

*Routledge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*

# **INTERPRETING HEGEL'S *PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT***

**EXPOSITIONS AND CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY  
READINGS**

Edited by  
Ivan Boldyrev and Sebastian Stein



# Interpreting Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

This book focuses on the interpretations of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that have proved influential over the past decades. Current readers of Hegel's *Phenomenology* face an abundance of interpretive literature devoted to this difficult text and confront a plethora of different philosophical presuppositions, research strategies and hermeneutic efforts. To enable a better orientation within the interpretative landscape, the essays in this volume summarize, contextualize and critically comment on the issues and currents in contemporary *Phenomenology* scholarship. There is a common set of three questions that each of the contributions seeks to answer: (1) What kind of text is *The Phenomenology of Spirit*? (2) What do the different strategies of interpretation conceptually bring to the text? (3) How do different interpreters justify their verdict on whether the *Phenomenology* is still a viable project?

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# Introduction

## On Meta-Readings

*Ivan Boldyrev and Sebastian Stein*

*The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) has long become a philosophical classic, and the three recent English translations of it that appeared almost simultaneously<sup>1</sup> only confirm the widespread interest in G. W. F. Hegel's first major published work. However, despite their advantages over previous renderings, the *Phenomenology* itself remains profoundly difficult and intriguing. Even a quick glance at the original German text suffices to realize that the issue lies not with translation alone: the readers find themselves confronted with a discourse of incomparable suggestive power *and* complexity that has exerted undeniable and well-documented influence even beyond Hegel studies while generating substantial confusion.

At the same time and despite its challenges, the *Phenomenology* has widely become regarded as the first of Hegel's works in which he successfully articulates some of his own philosophical insights and in which he employs his own deductive method, thus proving himself to be emancipated from his earlier conceptual commitments to Kant, Fichte and Schelling. It is thus with the *Phenomenology* that Hegel comes into his own, that he finds an independent voice and lays the groundwork for the major categorial and methodological insights, which would define his later encyclopedic system.

While the *Phenomenology*'s overarching argument begins with the same fundamental commitment to the primacy of finite subjects who have consciousness (in short, 'consciousness') that is also championed by Kant and Fichte, the work's upshot consists in showing that the internal contradictions of consciousness lead into the new category of *Geist* (spirit or mind), thus rendering consciousness the titular 'appearance' of *Geist*: 'we' as finite, conscious individuals are how *Geist* appears. This makes *Geist* the *Phenomenology*'s most fundamental notion of the kind of unconditioned truth that Kant and Fichte labelled 'the noumenon'<sup>2</sup> and 'god'<sup>3</sup> and that they placed beyond the reach of philosophical inquiry: to them, unconditioned truth and its appearance were separated by a kind of difference that rendered their knowledge-enabling identity impossible. In contrast, Hegel argues that *Geist* is accessible to conscious and philosophical

thought because consciousness—and thus the conscious philosopher—is how *Geist* manifests itself: since conscious thinkers *are* (identical with) *Geist*, they are able to philosophically know and describe it.

At the same time—and in contrast to Spinoza's account of the relationship between substance and particular subjects as its modes—Hegel argues that the identity that unites consciousness and *Geist* is structured in such a manner that the autonomy of the particular, conscious subjects cannot be explained away with reference to *Geist*'s all-pervading universality. Hegel thus holds on to Kant's and Fichte's commitment to the irreducible independence and self-determining autonomy of finite, conscious subjects while connecting these to *Geist*'s universality in such a manner that a property transfer between *Geist*'s universality and consciousness as *Geist*'s particularity is realized: *Geist* is concrete and particular *because* it appears as particular, conscious subjects. Meanwhile, the particular, conscious subjects are autonomous *because* they participate in *Geist*'s universality.

*Geist*'s universality is thus as determined and concrete as the particular, conscious subjects, while particular, conscious subjects are as universal and self-determining as *Geist*'s universality. Each irreducible moment is what it is in virtue of being identical with the respective other moment: they are it *and* it is them, *Geist* is us and we are *Geist*. While Kant and Fichte set out to protect 'our' individual consciousness and its autonomy by prioritizing it over unconditioned truth's (the noumenon's, god's) universality, Hegel thus defines individual autonomy *through* truth's (*Geist*'s) universality.

It is also in the *Phenomenology* that Hegel presents his own "scientific" (PS §5), philosophical method for the first time. He does so to answer Fichte's demand levelled towards Kant that the categories that define apperception and thus constitute philosophical knowledge about consciousness ought to be conceptually deduced with reference to the logical structure of the unity of consciousness.<sup>4</sup> According to Fichte, Kant only empirically linked his philosophical categories to the ontological minimum that is his transcendental unity of apperception, thus motivating Fichte to attempt and explicitly deduce all philosophical categories out of what he defined as the ontologically most fundamental principle, that is the relationship between the I and the Non-I.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, Hegel relies on the structure of 'the concept' (PS §4ff) as a deductive principle in the *Phenomenology*. He uses its manner of framing the relationship between universality and particularity to deduce his philosophical categories, that is the 'figures/shapes' (*Gestalten*) of *Geist*. In the resulting chain of categories, higher-order, more concrete categories result from the concept-caused, partial failure of previous ones, however, without discarding the failed categories' positive insights. Hegel thus presents his philosophical argument as a sequence of *reductiones ad absurdum* that transfer the categorial merits of more abstract categories

onto more concrete ones and thereby build a conceptual chain of particular categorial shapes that all share within an overarching, conceptual identity and that succeed each other spurred on by the negativity immanent in concept-based thought itself (PS §6).

While Hegel came to perfect this method in his subsequent work and supplemented, redefined, re-arranged or discarded some of the deductions that his enquiry in the *Phenomenology* produced, he also suggests that the *Phenomenology* presents *Geist's* unconditioned truth *as it is for consciousness* and not how it is in and for itself.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars take this to mean that the *Phenomenology* is best understood as a preparation for the philosophical system that begins with and is rooted in the *Science of Logic*. To them, the *Phenomenology* teaches the reader to think without presuppositions by clearing the mind of assumptions about consciousness-based thought to make way for properly philosophical reasoning that describes categorial truth as it is for *Geist* as truth itself.<sup>7</sup> However, one can also argue that insofar as the *Phenomenology* ends its deductions under the assumption that its categorial claims are how philosophical knowledge is defined for consciousness rather than for *Geist*, the further logical step that true philosophy must track truth as it is for truth rather than describe how truth is for consciousness may be taken by the *Phenomenology's* reader or not (PS §808). After all, it might be the *Phenomenology's* consistent methodological commitment to consciousness as a subject of philosophical thought as well as its extensive discussions of consciousness's categorial configurations that make it attractive to thinkers who are committed to the fundamental status of consciousness rather than *Geist*.

Beyond such content-related issues, the *Phenomenology* remains unrivalled within the Hegelian œuvre, not least thanks to its literary flair and its youthful intensity. It has thus become a classic text in its own right as its arguments have inspired profoundly different philosophical schools. An analysis of its account of sense-certainty, for example, could be invoked by Theodor Adorno criticizing Martin Heidegger,<sup>8</sup> by Giorgio Agamben willing to sketch a new philosophy of language<sup>9</sup> or by John McDowell and Robert Brandom when they interpreted Wilfrid Sellars's project.

The same is still happening today as the work's influence is stretching far beyond the circles of historians of philosophy as contemporary philosophers have found it to be a treasure chest (or a Pandora's box) of ideas. And while the 20th century saw mostly continental thinkers engage with it, contemporary analytic philosophers have discovered the *Phenomenology's* conceptual potential in more recent years, thus instilling new life into the text and stretching its reputation beyond the confines of entrenched philosophical currents. The book's influence even moves beyond philosophy itself: a wave of recent, wide-ranging interpretations from a multitude of disciplines has found psychological, aesthetic,

historical, sociological and political value in the *Phenomenology*'s arguments. Single-author commentaries on the work in its entirety,<sup>10</sup> as well as cooperative ones,<sup>11</sup> abound, as well as various books on particular topics, aspects or parts of the text—something that cannot be listed here in its entirety. Today, the spirit of the *Phenomenology* seems more alive than ever.

However, such inspirational power comes at a price. The sheer volume of available interpretations and critiques that have accrued over time will overwhelm most of those who are drawn to Hegel's work. Current readers of the *Phenomenology* thus face an abundance of interpretative literature devoted to this uneasy text and are hard-pressed to make a well-informed choice about how to approach it. This is particularly problematic as many of the interpreters bring their own im- or explicit, conscious or unconscious agendas to the text, frequently with great skill and powers of persuasion. While some of these adopt a more historical-exegetical posture unlocking the historical and potentially unconditioned meaning of Hegel's text, others make pragmatic use of the *Phenomenology*'s arguments to creatively integrate them into contemporary debates.

The various approaches to the *Phenomenology* thus differ greatly with respect to their philosophical presuppositions, research strategies and general perspectives on the text. At the same time, many commentators of the work avoid extensive engagement with other interpreters' efforts. Even among Hegel experts, this entails a lack of overview and orientation when dealing with such a multitude of available interpretations. This volume reacts to this fact by providing a general overview of many of the most influential interpretations of the *Phenomenology* and their relative strengths and shortcomings, aiming to aid those who are seeking orientation in the jungle of readings. It is to this end that the collection's contributions summarize, contextualize and critically comment on the issues and currents in contemporary *Phenomenology* scholarship.

Since most interpreters' theoretical commitments are often shared by various others, several of the contributions to this volume are not limited to the discussion of a single commentator but contextualize larger sets of interpretations. This facilitates the structuring of the body of available readings and brings into view the links between the visions of the *Phenomenology* as a whole and between the readings of its particular sections. While such a meta-commentary is itself not immune against bias and presuppositions, its assuming of a somewhat distanced vantage point may hope to aid the reader with achieving some degree of evaluative neutrality through a separation from others' and one's own assumptions.

In order to systematize its reflections on the literature, the volume defines a common set of three questions that the contributions seek to answer: (1) What kind of text is the *Phenomenology of Spirit*? (2) What are the conceptual contributions of existing interpretive strategies? and (3) How do different interpreters justify their verdict on whether

the *Phenomenology* is still a viable project? While this will reveal that there are some similarities between the interpretations, it should also clarify whether, how and why some approaches are incompatible with each other. With this in mind, the volume's contributors have taken up those themes of the *Phenomenology* that have sparked the most impactful debates or have hitherto been unduly underrepresented. Amongst these are (1) the status of the *Phenomenology* itself: is it a necessary, presuppositions-clearing introduction to Hegel's philosophy proper or is it already philosophy itself? If not, is it best understood as a philosophical, psychological, aesthetic (tragic or comic) or historical account? (2) the relationship between the notions of *Geist* and consciousness: if consciousness is but the "appearance" (PS §38) of *Geist* and *Geist* is the truth, why does Hegel spend time analyzing consciousness? What does it mean for the autonomy of consciousness when Hegel states that "the truth *must* appear"? (3) the master-slave dialectic: is it Hegel's analysis of how human relations happen to be, must be, should or should not be? Is it best read as a never-ending struggle or an inevitable step towards reconciliation? (4) Hegel's views on aesthetics: is art's beauty necessarily rooted in truth and must it convey an ethical message to qualify as art proper? (5) Hegel's concept of death: can and should Hegel defend the concept of personal immortality given his notion of historicity? (6) Hegel's concept of life: is Hegel's account of life 'logocentric' and does it fail to capture the essential temporality of human existence? (6) absolute knowing: why does Hegel revert to (Schiller's) poetry at the end of the *Phenomenology*, where he is expected to define the highest possible form of conceptual knowledge and what deeper attitude towards philosophy and art does his unfaithful quoting imply?

It could thus be argued that what happens in this book is itself Hegelian in different senses. First and foremost, the volume's engagement with the *readings* of Hegel is always also an engagement with Hegel's philosophy. Accordingly, some contributions do not overemphasize the reflective 'meta'-level of analysis and oscillate between the text of Hegel and that of his interpreters. Second, its task is an essentially systematizing one in the sense that the volume itself, by virtue of the plurality of the perspectives under discussion, treats a plethora of—sometimes barely compatible—readings that can hardly coexist under one heading. It thus takes a step towards a kind of mutual mediation, which is, of course, preliminary at best. Finally, the exercise of presenting such a variety in a unified manner may be taken as a speculative reconciliatory gesture: the protagonists of this book, although superficially associated through their attempts at making sense of Hegel's book, have often transcended the confines of their habitual areas of intellectual concern. Coming from different disciplinary corners, they discuss notable readers of the past such as Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, Alexandre Kojève, Henri Maldiney and Martin Heidegger alongside those working today, like Robert Brandom,



Rebecca Comay, Christoph Halbig, Stephen Houlgate, Fredric Jameson, John McCumber, John McDowell, Dean Moyar, Jean-Luc Nancy, Katrin Pahl, Terry Pinkard, Robert Pippin, Ludwig Siep and Slavoj Žižek.

In order to bring coherence to this enterprise, the structure of the volume follows the deductive structure of the *Phenomenology* itself as both the discussed interpreters of Hegel and the majority of the contributors prefer to unlock the work as a whole by drawing on particular shapes of *Geist*.

## 0.1 Stein—*Geist* and Consciousness

In his chapter “Truth and (its) Appearance in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*: Brandom, Pippin and Houlgate on *Geist* and Consciousness”, Sebastian Stein illustrates how Robert Brandom’s consciousness-centered, pragmatist reading of *Geist* (spirit/mind) is criticized by Robert Pippin for its alleged context-dependence and the resulting inability to explain Hegel’s universalist aspirations: according to Pippin, Brandom’s pragmatism cannot account for Hegel’s claim that his philosophical method and the socio-political norms he discusses are universal and necessary. However, insofar as also Pippin’s reading is grounded in finite consciousness rather than in infinite *Geist*, it, too, might render the universality of Hegel’s claims problematic. According to Stein, one possible way to avoid this is Hegel’s argument that consciousness is the particularity of *Geist*’s universality so that in truth, consciousness *is Geist*, albeit in the mode of appearance. The *Phenomenology*’s section on ‘absolute knowledge’ can thus be read as defining philosophical knowledge as a kind of knowledge that is had by *Geist* about itself. Stephen Houlgate’s interpretation seems compatible with such a reading since he argues that the *Phenomenology*’s claims are made about consciousness as such, which he defines as a form of universal being/thought. However, Houlgate rejects the notion that the *Phenomenology*’s claims represent philosophical truth proper. According to Stein, this points to an ambiguity in Hegel’s project as Hegel suggests that the *Phenomenology*’s truth claims are how truth (and thus *Geist*) is for consciousness rather than how it is for *Geist*. This seems to undermine the claims’ conceptual necessity and to sabotage their preparatory role for the kind of presuppositionless thought that is required by the *Logic* and the remainder of the encyclopedic system.

## 0.2 Trisokkas—Method and Truth

In his chapter “Heidegger on the Beginning of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*,” Ioannis Trisokkas discusses Martin Heidegger’s argument that Hegel’s philosophy has two beginnings: one necessary beginning with the *Phenomenology* and another with the *Science of Logic*. According to Trisokkas, Heidegger argues that the *Phenomenology* is marked by a

restless law that brings forth the different particular categorial forms of consciousness and *Geist*. This law is the ground “that grounds the ground provided by logic”. However, the law is neither grounded by pure logos nor the history of human consciousness. Instead, it is simply defined as “the truth of being” or the “inner light” of science. Knowledge of this self-contained law is qualitatively absolute knowledge that does not involve a mind’s going over to objects in order to know them. All one can do to comprehend or engage with it is to display “a most original (*ureigene*) adherence to the matter”.

### 0.3 Yampolskaya—Sensuous Experience in the Phenomenological Reading of the *Phenomenology*

In her chapter “‘Now Is the Night’: Deixis in Hegel and Maldiney”, Anna Yampolskaya discusses the often overlooked critique that the phenomenologist Henri Maldiney made of Hegel’s treatment of sense-certainty. From a post-Husserlian perspective inspired by Erwin Straus and Émile Benveniste, Maldiney argues that the contextuality (deixis) of speech act–like utterances such as “now is the night” cannot be separated from sense-experience and communication in the manner Hegel suggests. Hegel ignores these, Maldiney argues, and overlooks the fact that deictic expressions have a general meaning which is fixated in the event of speaking, and thus reduces language to its descriptive function and does not take into account the pragmatic dimension of human speech. Yampolskaya argues that deictic expressions share some features with performative speech acts and that beyond Hegel’s analysis, “it is due to the explosive power of deixis that a simple communication can exceed the framework of information exchange and become an encounter where a new subject and a new world are born”.

### 0.4 Teixeira—Ambiguities of Lordship and Bondage

In her chapter “Masters, Slaves, and Us: The Ongoing Allure of the Struggle for Recognition”, Marianna Teixeira revisits some exemplary readings of the most famous passage in the *Phenomenology*—the dialectics of lordship and bondage. She argues that agonistic readings emphasize the struggle for recognition of a slave (Alexandre Kojève), use Hegel’s dialectic to understand a woman as an absolute Other to a man (Simone de Beauvoir), or discuss the concept of race and the associated recognition-oriented struggles by referring to the same conceptual framework (Franz Fanon). In the latter two interpretations, there is a perceived lack of parity between the master and the slave, compared to Kojève and to Hegel’s original vision, but at the same time, both readings are shown to

be bringing this interaction closer to the original Hegelian rendering than is done by Kojève. Reconciliatory readings, in contrast, stress—and, for Teixeira, overemphasize—the mutuality of recognition and indicate that the ‘final struggle for recognition’ that Kojève is talking about never takes place in the *Phenomenology*. They consider the life and death struggle as one of the failures/pathologies of recognition (Michael Monahan, Richard Lynch) or merely as an immature developmental form (Nicholas Germana) of spirit. Teixeira shows that the key to understanding these disagreements lies in the complexity of the *Phenomenology*’s philosophical narrative as it interweaves the perspective of self-consciousness (giving more weight to agonistic readings) with the authorial perspective of absolute knowledge (for which mutual recognition and reconciliation are prevailing).

### 0.5 Redding—Lords and Bonds of the Mind

In his chapter “The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of ‘Lordship and Bondage’ in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*”, Paul Redding critically discusses McDowell’s unusual approach to the *Phenomenology*’s master–slave section, according to which the ‘consciousness of the other’ is but a dimension within the original consciousness. Redding identifies McDowell’s interest in the unification of consciousness and world as the main motivation for this interpretation and contrasts this approach with Pippin’s allegedly more Fichtean reading, according to which a finite consciousness needs an external summons to be motivated to enter legal, moral and ethical relationships. Redding appreciates that McDowell posits the unity of consciousness and world as fundamental, even if what Hegel discusses in the master–slave passage is not Hegel’s own account of recognition but a refutation of Fichte’s struggle-oriented concept. At the same time, Redding suggests that a reading of the *Phenomenology* based on the modal category of actuality will help dispel the Sellarsian focus on possibility present in both McDowell’s and Brandom’s thought and help appreciate the concrete dimension of Hegel’s philosophy.

### 0.6 Pulgar Moya—Lords and Bonds of the Factory

In his chapter “Self-Consciousness and Alienation: The Young Marx’s Reception of Hegel’s Master–Slave Dialectic”, Pablo Pulgar Moya discusses the different ways in which Marx applied the *Phenomenology*’s master–slave dialectic to his own analysis of bourgeois society and contrasts this with Kojève’s approach: according to Pulgar, the early Marx took some clues from Hegel’s phenomenological method when he defined his own materialist epistemology while the later Marx relied on it as a foundation of his own systematic analysis of sociopolitical reality. This becomes especially obvious in Marx’s discussions of domination and labor. In contrast to Kojève, who distorts the *Phenomenology* in his

attempts to interpret it psychologically, the later Marx argues that capital dominates labor in the way the master dominates the slave as the slave works for the master and not for herself. Capital thus defines classes by appropriating the means of production and assumes a social role that pursues its own interests. In response to and with knowledge of her own exploitation, the self-conscious slave then assumes a social role to abolish social relations as she recognizes that other subjects are alienated under such conditions. Thus, while the worker in capitalism is objectified by selling her own labor-power to another subject, this status also contains the elements necessary for abolishing the servile consciousness. Since the latter conflicts with material conditions, the slave first denies her labor for the master *de ratio* and then *de facto*. Crucially, Pulgar argues, the alienated worker does not carry out a “self-finalizing action” but instead, her forced labor functions as a negation of her assigned ontological condition.

### 0.7 Inwood—Death in the *Phenomenology*

In discussing “Hegel on Death”, Michael Inwood investigates Hegel’s uses of death as a metaphor and his conceptual claims about death as such. This enables Inwood to criticize Kojève’s argument that death is of central importance to Hegel: Hegel associates death with freedom from coercion, universality and spirit in general, arguing that spirit is what resists and contradicts natural death as it maintains itself in the face of it. Associating spirit with consciousness, death also implies that one differs from one’s body and its death. Inwood then argues against Kojève that Hegel’s treatment of death, god and the afterlife shows that these are distinct and that Hegel’s response to questions about any one of them does not commit him to giving any particular answer to questions about the others. Ultimately, to Inwood’s Hegel, god and the soul and consciousness are eternal not in the sense of duration but of self-referentiality and self-determination. Spirit, universality, freedom and eternity thus become synonymous and outrival death in philosophical significance.

### 0.8 Ostritsch—Moral Duties and the Limits of the *Phenomenology*

In his chapter “Hegel Versus Subjective Duties and External Reasons: Recent Readings of ‘Morality’ and ‘Conscience’ in the *Phenomenology* of Spirit”, Sebastian Ostritsch discusses the *Phenomenology*’s account of morality, conscience and moral motivation. Ostritsch draws on Halbig’s account of subjective and objective duties and argues against Moyal that the *Phenomenology* champions the notion of subjective yet objectively valid moral duties. Instead, Ostritsch maintains, the *Phenomenology* only establishes the failure of morality’s subjective duties and relies on religion and forgiveness to resolve this issue. A notion of truly ethical duties that unite the subjective and objective dimensions only becomes available

with the *Philosophy of Right*. Ostritsch then agrees with Pippin's reading that Hegel is an internalist that nevertheless allows for an external dimension of moral motivation. Since the *Phenomenology* does not identify a suitable set of motivating reasons, one turns to the *Philosophy of Right* for a coherent Hegelian answer to these issues.

## 0.9 Speight—Ethical Life and the Hegelian Narrative

In “Heroism Without Fate, Self-Consciousness Without Alienation’: Antigone, Trust and the Narrative Structure of Spirit”, Allen Speight reads Robert Brandom's recent book—*A Spirit of Trust*—with the aim of clarifying the overall narrative structure of the *Phenomenology*. This leads him to reject Brandom's allegedly too straightforward reading of Hegel's chapter on spirit. In particular, Speight shows that already on the level of ‘ethical life’/*Sittlichkeit*, in the first immediate appearance of spirit, where an agent seems to be fully identified with the law, we are unable to understand the normative force of the law without taking into account the plurality of subjective attitudes towards that law. Antigone, the crucial figure of ‘ethical life’, is thus not a passive embodiment of spirit because spirit is, after all, a rational (‘reason’-based) *self*-consciousness developing itself in the lifeworld. Thus, while building on the tragic and heroic narratives, Hegel is more ‘speculative’ than Brandom in that Hegel keeps this idea of self-consciousness/self-awareness of the figures active throughout his narrative and does not abstract it away in the manner Brandom does with his account of stages in the development of normative standpoints. Speight further argues that the continuity makes Hegel's dialectical narrative ‘more open to a side of negativity and vulnerability’—something that is missing in Brandom.

## 0.10 Hindrichs—Trauma and History

Gunnar Hindrichs argues that Rebecca Comay's *Mourning Sickness* is an important reading of Hegel's chapter on Spirit and puts it in the context of a broader engagement with the *Phenomenology*. With its re-evaluation of the radical negativity (of terror) as a constitutive non-identity of time and historical experience, Comay's interpretation goes against the widespread pragmatist account of Hegel's text that sees it as a mere description of how normative practices improve solidarity in the space of reasons and for which any failure is only a temporary pathology. However, what Hindrichs misses in her account is a definitive restatement of a properly Hegelian position that would synthesize the negativity that is constitutive of any historical experience *and* the truth of spirit's development, for which revolution becomes an untrue manifestation to be overcome in another untrue manifestation—that is, in religion. In the end, Hindrichs does not accept the reading of Hegel's revolution as trauma and suggests instead to

read it as one of spirit's incarnations. One could thus say that Hindrichs agrees with Comay's specific readings and with her rendering of Hegel's unresolved negativity as the core of the historical experience of modernity but does not wish to rethink the whole project of the *Phenomenology* along the lines of trauma, non-identity, and non-sublateable, recurring lack.

### 0.11 Wallenstein—Phenomenological End of Art

In "Hegel's Art-Religion in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and Beyond", Sven-Olov Wallenstein asks how one can understand the function and the status of art in Hegel's philosophy and, in particular, in the phenomenological figures of Spirit. Art may be an object of analysis, and this makes the *Phenomenology* a preliminary step towards Hegel's later Berlin aesthetics, but it could also be a collection of 'operators'—as models for speculative thinking. By drawing on the variety of interpretations—ranging from Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert and Walter Jaeschke to Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy—Wallenstein comments on different meanings of the infamous 'end of the art' thesis and rethinks the ways in which art could be both 'the thing of the past' and the ever-present possibility of speculative thinking.

### 0.12 Watkins—Understanding Hegel's Phenomenological Account of Religion

In his chapter "Religion in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*", Lee Watkins argues that while Hegel thinks that philosophy conveys the same truth as religion, philosophy can only be alive and concrete if it is inspired by religion's imagery, rites and cultus: "without living religion as the basis for philosophy, philosophy becomes merely an empty abstraction. It will never ring true for anyone because it does not appeal to the individual's deeply felt need for dialectical reconciliation with the world". Watkins draws on Ludwig Siep to illustrate Hegel's notion of religion and engages with Terry Pinkard and Stephen Houlgate to investigate in which sense Hegel can be called a religious thinker. He then draws on an interpretation by Burbidge to explain the decline of the influence of Christianity and to answer the question of how one might begin looking for religion in the world today. Finally, Watkins agrees with Jean-Luc Nancy that

[e]ven as it retreats, religion leaves behind it a shadow by which its presence is still felt. Perhaps it is in the deconstruction of religion that spirituality will persist in the modern world, or out of which something new will emerge that will serve the essential functions of religion as Hegel identified them.

### 0.13 Mascat—A Marxist Hegel and the Need for Totality

In her “Absolute Mapping: Jameson’s Variations on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*”, Jamila Mascat revisits Fredric Jameson’s work on Hegel and shows how Jameson tries to expose the true openness of the dialectic in the speculative project of the *Phenomenology*, a ‘non-teleological Hegel’. Mascat demonstrates how Jameson’s Marxist reading skips the notion of the absolute and thus overlooks the conceptual potentialities that Jameson, perhaps following Georg Lukács, sees in the perspective of totality, that is an intellectual grasp of the whole of capitalist society (which was Hegel’s, as is ours):

The theoretical gap between Hegel’s all-too-modern Absolute and Jameson postmodern totality can be interpreted as reflecting the wide shift occurring in the transition from 18th-19th century capitalism to 20th century late capitalism. However, the abstract and concealing nature of the capitalist machine and its power relations as an all-encompassing, albeit untotalizable totality lays the foundations for Hegel’s speculative edifice as much as for Jameson’s drive towards cognitive mapping.

Mascat thus not only attempts to make sense of Jameson’s reading of the *Phenomenology* but also aims to help Jameson mend together pieces of his own left-Hegelian interpretations of modernity.

### 0.14 Boldyrev—Hegel’s Textual Work in *Absolute Knowledge*

In “The Last Sigh of Absolute Knowledge: Schiller’s *Friendship* and Hegel’s Readers”, Ivan Boldyrev joins the ranks of the interpreters of one curious fact: when choosing the last words for the *Phenomenology*, Hegel borrowed from a poem by Schiller but modified the quotation. Various readers—Rebecca Comay, Alexandre Kojève, John McCumber, Katrin Pahl, Robert Pippin and Slavoj Žižek—made different uses of this fact in order to clarify both Hegel’s writing practices in the *Phenomenology*, the meaning of the whole work and the dialectics as such. Comparing these readings, Boldyrev demonstrates that a careful historical reconstruction that takes seriously the various uses of Schiller’s text in Hegel’s œuvre, the details of Hegel’s editing work, and the vicissitudes of speculative punctuation reveal the continued dependence of Hegel’s writing on Schiller that might have wide-ranging consequences for our understanding of his speculative project in the *Phenomenology* and beyond.

In unison, the collection’s authors recognize the wealth of epistemological, ethical, aesthetic, political and hermeneutic insights that Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is known for. By bringing together their meta-readings, the editors hope to increase the visibility of the various philosophical and

exegetic approaches to this work and stage this mutual encounter as an act of speculative *friendship*. If the implicit suggestion for the readers of Hegel to read each other manages to spark the interest of broader circles of philosophers, intellectual historians, political theorists and others through the efforts documented here and should the collection encourage readers to open up towards others' disciplinary commitments or simply to enquire more about the multiple intellectual traditions in Hegel scholarship, then the hopes associated with this volume would be more than fulfilled.

## Notes

- 1 By Michael Inwood, Terry Pinkard and Peter Fuss and John Dobbins.
- 2 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* 1794 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1997), p. 140.
- 3 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Wissenschaftslehre in ihrem allgemeinen Umrisse* (1810) (in *Fichtes Werke*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), p. 696.
- 4 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Wissenschaftslehre: Zweiter Vortrag im Jahre 1804* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1986), p. 96.
- 5 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1994), p. 44, p. 140, p. 176.
- 6 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (G. di Giovanni, transl., ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 10–11.
- 7 See the recent comprehensive overview of various approaches to the intricate connections between the *Phenomenology* and *Logic* in: Brady Bowman, "Zum Verhältnis von Hegels *Wissenschaft der Logik* zur *Phänomenologie des Geistes* in der Gestalt von 1807. Ein Überblick", in Michael Quante, Nadine Mooren (eds.) *Kommentar zu Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2018), pp. 1–42.
- 8 See Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 126.
- 9 Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death. The Place of Negativity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
- 10 Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer's *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes. Ein dialogischer Kommentar. Band 1: Gewissheit und Vernunft. Band 2: Geist und Religion* (Meiner 2014) William Bristow's *Hegel and the Transformation of Philosophical Critique* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Alfred Denker's *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: New Critical Essays* (Prometheus, 2012), Robert Pippin's *Hegel on Self-Consciousness, Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), Jon Stewart's *The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Systematic Interpretation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000).
- 11 Klaus Vieweg's und Wolfgang Welsch's *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes. Ein kooperativer Kommentar zu einem Schlüsselwerk der Moderne* (Fra. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008), Dean Moyar's and Michael Quante's *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Kenneth Westphal's *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2009) and Jon Stewart's *The Phenomenology of Spirit Reader* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1998).



# 1 Heidegger on the Beginning of Hegel's Phenomenology

*Ioannis Trisokkas*

## 1.1 Introduction

In his *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (hereafter *HPS*),<sup>1</sup> which includes his 1930–31 lectures on *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Heidegger states not only that Hegelian phenomenology “begins absolutely with the absolute” but also that this phenomenological beginning is a *necessary* beginning of Hegel’s “system of science.” Although Heidegger acknowledges that the “proper” or “appropriate” beginning or “ground” of this system is the logical beginning (the beginning posited by Hegelian logic), he insists not only that there is also a second beginning of the system, namely, the one provided by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but also that this beginning is necessary. Thus, Heidegger subscribes to the paradoxically sounding thesis that Hegel’s system of science *must* have *two* beginnings. The present chapter attempts, first, to flesh out this thesis (§§2–4) and, second, to uncover Heidegger’s *argument* for (or *justification* of) the claim that the *phenomenological* beginning is *necessary* to the Hegelian system of science (§§5–6).

Heidegger’s argument for the necessity of the phenomenological beginning brings out what Heidegger calls “the inner law of the work [i.e., the *Phenomenology*],”<sup>2</sup> a “law” that “enabl[es] us to attain the depth and fullness of the whole [of the *Phenomenology*].”<sup>3</sup> This “law” is contrasted with the “peculiarity” and “actuality” characterizing differently *each* form of consciousness, “each stage of [the] history” of consciousness, which are the individual “components” of the *Phenomenology*.<sup>4</sup> Although it is important not to neglect these different peculiarities and actualities, it is equally important not to lose ourselves in them:<sup>5</sup> we must make an effort to uncover “the lawfulness proper (*eigene*) to the work and its problem.”<sup>6</sup> This lawfulness is brought out, I maintain, by the argument for the necessity of the phenomenological beginning, which the forthcoming discussion will seek to uncover.

## 1.2 Absolute and Relative Knowledge, Absolute and Explicit Beginning

Heidegger's distinctive and most important thesis in *HPS*, which drives his whole interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, is that phenomenology "begins absolutely with the absolute."<sup>7</sup> To understand this thesis we need to have an idea of what Heidegger means with "begins absolutely" and "the absolute." There are many indications in *HPS* that "absolute knowledge" is used synonymously with "the absolute."<sup>8</sup> So Heidegger's thesis is that phenomenology begins absolutely with *absolute knowledge*.

Absolute knowledge is defined in contrast to *relative knowledge*. Yet, there are *two* ways to understand the "relativity" and, correspondingly, the "absoluteness" of knowledge: quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively relative knowledge is knowledge of a *part*, instead of the whole, of a domain. It exists "when there is still something else about which that knowledge knows *nothing*."<sup>9</sup> Or, again, it is that knowledge "which does *not* know *everything* there is to know."<sup>10</sup> In contradistinction to this notion of relative knowledge, absolute knowledge would be quantitatively absolute, meaning that "it ... know[s] everything there is to know."<sup>11</sup> *Quantitatively* relative and absolute knowledge are determined, then, by the *range* of knowing (a part or the whole of a domain).

Heidegger claims that "for Hegel the concepts of relative and absolute, as characters of knowledge, are to be understood not quantitatively but qualitatively."<sup>12</sup> (So, for Heidegger, Hegel's "absolute" is *not*, as commonly assumed, a term describing a mind that knows *everything* there is to know.) Qualitatively relative knowledge is knowledge that exhibits "a relation to that which is known," "a knowledge of something,"<sup>13</sup> or, if you will, a relation to and a knowledge of *objects*. Heidegger informs us also, very importantly, that in qualitatively *relative* knowledge, knowledge is "being carried over to that which it knows,"<sup>14</sup> that it "*is consumed* by it, surrenders to it, and is knowingly lost in it."<sup>15</sup> It is a knowledge that is "caught up and imprisoned by what it knows."<sup>16</sup> Later, Heidegger repeats this characterization of qualitatively relative knowledge: "to know relatively [is] to know merely by constantly fastening precisely on what is known" and "to be absorbed in what is known."<sup>17</sup>

The notion of absolute knowledge's "being carried over" to "what is known" (object) is especially significant here because it designates a "gap" between the mind that knows and the object of knowledge. I will understand qualitatively relative knowledge as a "knowledge," or, better, a mind, that *assumes* that knowledge is only about objects that are distinct from it and, what is more important, *that for this knowledge to be established there has to be an active or passive relation to those objects*: this means, it *assumes* that knowledge has to either be *confirmed* by distinct

objects or be *imposed* on distinct objects. This structure holds even for a mind that purports to know *itself* or its *knowledge* as an *object*: it either demands *confirmation* of itself or its knowledge by a distinct material self or knowledge or conceives of itself or its knowledge as having a structure that has been *imposed* on it by a distinct presence of its self or its knowledge. As Heidegger points out, “such a relative knowledge ... Hegel calls ... ‘consciousness.’”<sup>18</sup>

Since absolute knowledge is “not relative” knowledge, qualitatively absolute knowledge does not exhibit the characteristics of relative knowledge. Therefore, it is not exhibited as a *relation* to an object. This means: it does not involve a carrying over to the object, a consumption by it, a surrender to it, and a getting lost in it. To my mind, what Heidegger claims here is that absolute knowledge, determined in qualitatively absolute terms, is an intelligence or a mind that acquires knowledge, either of an object or of itself or of its knowledge, *by staying solely within itself*, to wit, by not “relating” to objects, by not going over to them. In Heidegger’s words,

the manner of this knowing is not to know relatively, not to know merely by constantly fastening precisely on what is known, but rather [to know by] detaching oneself (*sich ablösend*) from *what* is known.... It means not to be absorbed in what is known ...<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Heidegger’s thesis that phenomenology begins absolutely with absolute knowledge means that phenomenology begins absolutely with *qualitatively* absolute knowledge, namely, with a knowledge that does not involve a mind’s going over to objects in order to know them.

If Heidegger’s thesis was simply that phenomenology begins with absolute knowledge, it would be obviously wrong, for phenomenology *apparently* or *explicitly* begins with *consciousness*. Sense-certainty, with which phenomenology begins, is explicitly a form of consciousness, not absolute knowledge. Yet, what Heidegger claims, more accurately, is that phenomenology begins *absolutely* with absolute knowledge. Therefore, in Heidegger’s reading of the *Phenomenology*, phenomenology has two simultaneous beginnings: (a) an absolute beginning, made with absolute knowledge, and (b) an apparent or explicit beginning, made with consciousness.

What does it mean to say that phenomenology “begins absolutely” with absolute knowledge? What is an “absolute beginning”? To my mind, Heidegger’s signification of “absolute beginning” is that it is a beginning that involves the *essence* of the subject matter (*die Sache*) that begins. To say that phenomenology begins absolutely with absolute knowledge is to say that it begins *essentially* with absolute knowledge, to wit, that phenomenology is, “deep down,” about absolute knowledge from the beginning (and not only at the end).<sup>20</sup> It is to say also that the essence of relative knowledge or consciousness is absolute knowledge.

An absolute beginning, which captures the essence of the subject matter, does not exclude the possibility that it could also be an explicit beginning

(that is to say, a discipline or a subject matter could begin *explicitly* with its essence), but, crucially, it also does *not* entail that it is immediately apparent or explicit (to wit, a discipline or a subject matter may *not* begin *explicitly* with its essence, although the essence will, of course, be there *implicitly*). Specifically, in the case of phenomenology (consciousness), it so happens that its absolute beginning is *not* explicit; it is, rather, hidden or “concealed.” As Heidegger puts it, phenomenology’s absolute beginning with absolute knowledge “is simply concealed from us.”<sup>21</sup> Or, again,

relative knowledge is also absolute knowledge, although in a concealed way.<sup>22</sup>

The relation between the two beginnings of phenomenology, as well as their relation to the beginning of logic, is what we need to clarify in order to get the substance of Heidegger’s interpretation of the *Phenomenology*.

### 1.3 The Phenomenology-System *versus* the Encyclopedia-System

Heidegger’s puzzlement over the *Phenomenology* stems from his belief that, for Hegel, the “system of science” contains two beginnings, one provided by phenomenology, another by logic. Insofar as the system begins with phenomenology, it takes the form of “the phenomenology-system,” in which phenomenology “grounds” logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit. Yet, insofar as the system begins with logic, it takes the form of “the encyclopedia-system,” in which logic grounds philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit.<sup>23</sup> The question is *why* the system *must* have two beginnings and especially a beginning with phenomenology.

Logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit correspond, Heidegger maintains, to the constituent disciplines of traditional metaphysics. The latter has two parts: *metaphysica generalis* and *metaphysica specialis*. While *metaphysica generalis* consists of ontology, *metaphysica specialis* consists of speculative psychology, speculative cosmology, and speculative theology. Hegel’s philosophy of nature corresponds to speculative cosmology, his philosophy of spirit to speculative psychology, and his logic to “an original unity” of ontology and speculative theology, an “onto-theology.”<sup>24</sup>

What is significant to note here is that, for Heidegger, traditional metaphysics and, consequently, the encyclopedia-system have absolute knowledge or “the absolute” as their explicit subject matter. Logic begins by positing the minimal structure of absolute knowledge, which is pure, indeterminate being or, what means the same, the *sheer* identity of thought and being, from which all determinacy of absolute knowledge—in one way or another—derives. It is the positing of the standpoint (the framework) of a knowledge that knows its objects and itself by staying solely within itself. Since logic posits a beginning that explicitly presents

(the sheer identity of) absolute knowledge, it would seem that a system of science that provides an exposition of absolute knowledge would need no other beginning than the logical beginning.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, as Heidegger points out, Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology*, which was published in 1807, with the intention of producing “the first part of the system, ... the foundation of metaphysics, its grounding.”<sup>26</sup> He describes this “grounding” as “the preparation of the basis” or of “the space, the dimensionality, the realm of expansion” of metaphysics. Since “the encyclopedia contains the whole of metaphysics,”<sup>27</sup> phenomenology was originally produced with the aim of “grounding” the encyclopedic sciences. Thus, the system of science, if it is understood in terms of the phenomenology-system, contains a ground that grounds the ground provided by logic. The question Heidegger asks is what this ground is and especially why it *must* exist.

Heidegger mentions that in 1817, when Hegel publishes the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (hereafter “the *Encyclopedia*”), the system of science no longer contains phenomenology as its first part.<sup>28</sup> Instead, logic becomes the first part and hence the “ground” or “foundation”<sup>29</sup> of the system. Phenomenology, however, does not disappear altogether: in the encyclopedia-system, phenomenology “became a segment of the third part of the system, namely, the Philosophy of Spirit.”<sup>30</sup> So phenomenology “has now lost its *fundamental* position and function in the transformed system of philosophy”<sup>31</sup> and becomes part of *metaphysica specialis* (in particular, of speculative psychology). Henceforth, I refer to the phenomenology thematized by the *Phenomenology* as “the 1807 phenomenology” and to the phenomenology thematized by the *Encyclopedia* as “the encyclopedic phenomenology.” As Heidegger notes elsewhere, *the 1807 phenomenology and the encyclopedic phenomenology have substantially the same content*.<sup>32</sup> This identity of content between the two phenomenologies is crucial in what follows.

Could it be that Hegel thought that his initial belief that the 1807 phenomenology is the first part of the system of science was an *error*, which he sought to correct by making phenomenology simply a segment of philosophy of spirit? This is a very important question, because if the answer is positive, the question concerning the necessity of the phenomenological beginning of the system no longer has any validity. Crucially, Heidegger answers the question in the negative.<sup>33</sup> He thinks that there are strong reasons prohibiting a positive answer. First, shortly before he died, Hegel started preparing a new edition of the *Phenomenology* (why would he do this if the *Phenomenology* was an “error”?). Second, in the *Science of Logic* (hereafter “the *Logic*”), whose first volume was published in 1812 and the second in 1816, he explicitly refers to the *Phenomenology* as being the *Logic*’s justification and presupposition.<sup>34</sup> Heidegger emphasizes that “not only do we find anticipatory references to the *Logic* in the *Phenomenology*, but also the reverse: references back from the *Logic*

to the *Phenomenology*.”<sup>35</sup> This confirms “the inner, essential relation”<sup>36</sup> between phenomenology and logic as Part I (the “foundation”) and (the first part of) Part II of the “system of science,” respectively. It seems that even when absolute knowledge was explicitly posited as the system’s beginning or ground, Hegel still thought that the system is grounded in the 1807 phenomenology, which, therefore, must *still* have functioned at that time as a beginning of the system.

Independently of what one thinks of the “error view” of the *Phenomenology*, one cannot but accept that *Heidegger*, precisely because he does not conform to this view, is *obliged* to explain the *necessity* of the phenomenological beginning. Why *must* phenomenology *precede* logic? The question becomes particularly pressing if we take into consideration the already mentioned fact that Heidegger takes the 1807 phenomenology to have substantially the same content as the encyclopedic phenomenology. If the encyclopedia-system already contains the phenomenological content, what does the system of science gain by demanding that this content functions also as a beginning of it? Before I turn my complete attention to this question, let me consider Heidegger’s account of the “journey” from the phenomenological to the logical beginning.

#### 1.4 From the Beginning of Phenomenology to the Beginning of Logic

The following passage clarifies Heidegger’s understanding of the relation between the beginning of phenomenology and the beginning of logic:

[L]ogic [becomes the] only appropriate beginning [of the system of science] ... because the system of absolute knowing, if it understands itself correctly, must have an absolute beginning. Now, since on the one hand the phenomenology does not begin as absolutely as the logic does and thus must be left out of the beginning of the system, while on the other hand the phenomenology prepares the domain for a possible absolute beginning, the omission of the phenomenology from the encyclopedia-system articulates its indispensable affiliation with and relationship to this system.<sup>37</sup>

We should notice the claim that the system of absolute knowing (another name for “the system of science”) “*must* have an absolute beginning”: certainly, this means that the system *must* begin with *absolute knowledge*. Yet, we already know that phenomenology, in Heidegger’s view, *does* begin with absolute knowledge. The above excerpt is so important because it makes it clear that, for Heidegger, phenomenology’s beginning with the absolute is *not as absolute* as logic’s beginning with it. To say that phenomenology’s beginning is “not as absolute” as logic’s beginning is to imply that the first is “less absolute” than the second.

On the one hand, this difference in *the degree of absoluteness* between the two beginnings is the reason why the logical beginning must “replace” the phenomenological beginning as the ground of the system of science. On the other hand, the phenomenology-system cannot be thrown away, precisely because the “replacement” of the (unavoidable) phenomenological beginning by the logical beginning results from phenomenology’s own performance. This is why Heidegger writes that phenomenology “prepares the domain for a possible absolute beginning”: this means it produces the “more absolute” beginning of logic through its subject matter, the dialectic of consciousness. Phenomenology (the dialectic of consciousness) “belongs *necessarily* to [the] inner form” of Hegel’s philosophy<sup>38</sup> because without it the system of science cannot begin “properly” or “appropriately,” to wit, with the “more absolute” beginning of logic. *If* the phenomenological beginning is necessary, the logical beginning cannot *simply* be posited: it can appear *only* through the phenomenology’s performance.

One may justifiably ask: Since phenomenology has an absolute beginning, as logic does, why is its beginning deemed “less absolute” than logic’s? This must be owed to the *one* property that is present in the absolute beginning of phenomenology and absent from the absolute beginning of logic: its being accompanied by a second beginning, the explicit beginning with relative knowledge. Heidegger claims that phenomenology’s absolute beginning is *necessarily attached* to relative knowledge.<sup>39</sup> Such an attachment is missing from logic’s beginning, hence its being “more absolute” than phenomenology’s beginning. At the beginning of logic, what is present is *solely* absolute knowledge.

The elucidation of the difference between the two beginnings helps us disclose the meaning of phenomenology’s performance, namely, the *process* of “grounding” or “preparing” metaphysics or, if you prefer, the logical beginning. Such a *process* of grounding is imperative because the very notion of “absolute knowledge” demands that the system of *absolute knowledge* begins with an absolute beginning that is *not* attached to relative knowledge. Since absolute knowledge is, according to Heidegger, initially *necessarily* attached to relative knowledge, phenomenology’s grounding of metaphysics or of “the system of absolute knowledge” *necessarily* has the form of absolute knowledge’s liberation or “absolution” from relative knowledge. In Heidegger’s own words,

[absolute knowledge] must not remain bound [to relative knowledge] but must liberate and ab-solve itself from *what* it knows and yet as so ab-solved, as absolute, still be knowledge.<sup>40</sup>

The phenomenology-system is indispensable because (a) absolute knowledge is initially *necessarily* attached to relative knowledge (phenomenology’s subject matter) and (b) if the system of absolute knowledge is to

“understand itself correctly” (to wit, as *absolute* knowledge), absolute knowledge *must* absolve itself from its attachment to relative knowledge. Phenomenology is the “science” performing the absolution of absolute knowledge from relative knowledge. Yet, the encyclopedia-system is also indispensable because the system of absolute knowledge, if it “understands itself correctly,” must *begin* with “pure” absolute knowledge, namely, an absolute knowledge that exhibits no attachment to relative knowledge. This beginning is offered by logic. Therefore, in Heidegger’s understanding of Hegel’s system of science, the latter *must* have two grounds or beginnings. The first ground is provided by phenomenology, which removes the attachment to relative knowledge, so that the system can begin in accordance with its notion. The second ground is provided by logic, which begins solely with absolute knowledge, without the “contamination” of an explicit beginning with relative knowledge.

Robert Sinnerbrink agrees that the distinctive thesis of Heidegger’s interpretation of the *Phenomenology* is the absolute’s *parousia* at the phenomenological beginning.<sup>41</sup> He understands this as meaning that the *phenomenological observer* possesses absolute knowledge from the beginning of the *Phenomenology*.<sup>42</sup> Because he understands Heidegger’s thesis in this way, Sinnerbrink focuses on “who is the ‘we’ in Heidegger’s reading of Hegel.”<sup>43</sup> He concludes that

the difficulty in Heidegger’s ontological interpretation [is] that presupposing absolute knowledge seems to make redundant the project of a phenomenology before it even begins.<sup>44</sup>

It seems to me that this specific objection to Heidegger’s interpretation might not hold.<sup>45</sup> For the phenomenological project to become redundant, absolute knowledge must be *explicitly* present at the phenomenological beginning or, what means the same, that *consciousness must not be explicitly present thereat*. Although Heidegger does seem to suggest that—at a certain phenomenological level—there is an explicit presence of absolute knowledge in “*us*” or in *Hegel* at the phenomenological beginning,<sup>46</sup> the crucial thing is that, for him, the explicit presence of *consciousness* hinders the absolute’s explicit appearance. So, while it may be important that “we” have explicit absolute knowledge at the beginning of phenomenology, this should not hide the fact that consciousness is explicitly present and is not such knowledge. As long as consciousness obscures the appearing of the absolute, the phenomenological project, which, in Heidegger’s view, aims at incorporating consciousness into the explicit appearance of the absolute and thereby at canceling out consciousness’s explicitness, cannot be said to be redundant.

But, of course, this account of the necessity of the 1807 phenomenology, to wit, that it is needed for the absolute’s absolution from its attachment to relative knowledge, is valid *only if* Heidegger is right that



absolute knowledge is *necessarily* attached to relative knowledge before there can be a positing of “pure” absolute knowledge by means of logic. Does Heidegger have an argument that supports *this* claim? Why *must* the absolute be attached to relative knowledge before it can explicitly appear? To this question I now turn.

### 1.5 Absolute Knowledge’s Coming to Itself Through Its Other

§5 of *HPS* provides us with important information concerning the crucial issue of Heidegger’s attempt to justify the necessity of absolute knowledge’s attachment to relative knowledge at the phenomenological beginning. The characteristic title of §5 is “The presupposition of the *Phenomenology*: Its absolute beginning with the absolute.”<sup>47</sup> For Heidegger, the *Phenomenology* is not presuppositionless. Its presupposition is the absolute, with which it begins absolutely. Since, however, the *Phenomenology* does not show the absolute at its beginning, there arises the question why Heidegger thinks that the absolute must be present at that beginning.<sup>48</sup>

Heidegger starts by stating that phenomenology must begin with absolute knowledge because “this knowledge *must* come to itself.”<sup>49</sup> Coming-to-itself here means moving-toward-and-arriving-at-itself, or, simply, one’s coming to oneself through a *process*. Coming-to-itself contrasts with being-*posited*, with *immediately*-showing-itself. Therefore, in Heidegger’s view, absolute knowledge is present at the phenomenological beginning because it cannot show itself immediately: it has to perform a movement towards its explicitness.

Yet, this response does not really justify the necessity of the absolute’s *parousia* at the phenomenological beginning. This is so because one now asks: Why *must* the absolute come to itself in order to appear? Why can absolute knowledge not show itself immediately? This worry is particularly pressing insofar as logic *does* begin with the positing of the minimal structure of pure absolute knowledge (pure, indeterminate being, the sheer identity of thought and being), from which *all* determinacy of absolute knowledge derives (including its determination as consciousness in philosophy of spirit). If one begins with logic, it is difficult to see why the positing of absolute knowledge must have been *preceded* with its coming to itself through consciousness. Accordingly, some justification, some reason, must be given for it.

Heidegger does not resolve this issue in §5 of *HPS*, yet he makes his response more informative by spelling out the fact that the notion of the absolute’s coming to itself involves a connection with the notion of *otherness*. This is what he writes:

If absolute knowledge as a knowing knowledge is wholly itself only at the end, and if absolute knowledge is a knowing knowledge by

becoming it, by coming to itself, *and is that by becoming other to itself*, then absolute knowledge *must* at the beginning of its movement toward itself be not yet with itself.<sup>50</sup>

Here Heidegger qualifies the absolute's coming to itself: it must come to itself "by becoming other to itself." So, what the coming-to-itself offers to absolute knowledge is this connection to otherness. Hegel, Heidegger thinks, tells us that absolute knowledge is necessarily attached to relative knowledge at the beginning of the 1807 *phenomenology* because absolute knowledge must come to itself first through its other. This, however, does not provide justification for the absolute's necessary connection to consciousness *prior* to the positing of the absolute at the logical beginning, precisely because one now asks *why* the absolute *must* have a necessary connection to its *other*. Why must the absolute connect to otherness *prior* to its immediate positing as pure, indeterminate being?

As noted, Heidegger does not answer this question in §5 of *HPS*. He does, however, draw an important ramification from the new information he has provided, namely, that the beginning of the 1807 *phenomenology* is *paradoxical*. If one accepts that absolute knowledge must come to itself *first* through its other, one must also accept that "absolute knowledge *must* at the beginning of its movement toward itself be *not yet* with itself." The "not yet" here signifies the presence of the absolute in *otherness*. Heidegger acknowledges that this characterization of the phenomenological beginning is fully paradoxical. As he puts it,

[a]bsolute knowledge must still be other, and indeed *without* having become other to itself.<sup>51</sup>

This is the paradox of the beginning and the whole course of the *Phenomenology* (excepting only its end, explicit absolute knowledge). Both at the beginning and in the whole course of the *Phenomenology*, consciousness is and is not absolute knowledge. Insofar as consciousness is not absolute knowledge, absolute knowledge is an other to consciousness. Insofar as consciousness is absolute knowledge, absolute knowledge is not an other to consciousness: they are the same. Yet if both of these hold, as they do, absolute knowledge is and is not an other to consciousness: it is both different to and the same with consciousness. Only at the end of the *Phenomenology*, absolute knowledge liberates itself from this paradox.

The *otherness* of absolute knowledge at the phenomenological beginning is emphasized in what follows:

It [i.e., absolute knowledge] must be something different at the beginning of the experience that consciousness undergoes with itself, an experience which is nothing other than the movement or the history in which *coming to itself* takes place as *becoming other to itself*.<sup>52</sup>

Absolute knowledge *must* be different from itself at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*: it *must* be consciousness. Why *must* it be different? Precisely because it *must* come to itself *by becoming other to itself*. The experience of consciousness—the theme of the *Phenomenology*—is the “movement” or the “history” in which the *other* of absolute knowledge, consciousness, is led to absolute knowledge.

Yet, Heidegger wants to equally stress that the movement or history of consciousness is the movement or history of absolute knowledge. This is feasible because consciousness and absolute knowledge are the *same*. As he writes,

[a]t the beginning of its history, absolute knowledge must be different from what it is at the end. Certainly. But this otherness does not mean that knowledge is at the beginning *not yet and in no way* absolute knowledge. On the contrary, this knowledge is right at the beginning already absolute knowledge...<sup>53</sup>

Absolute knowledge’s otherness is at the beginning of the *Phenomenology* accompanied by absolute knowledge’s presence. This is the paradox with which the *Phenomenology* begins: consciousness is and is not absolute knowledge.

The paradox is a consequence of the demand that absolute knowledge *must* come to itself first through its other, namely, consciousness. But why *must* this be? Does Heidegger have an answer to *this* question?

## 1.6 Restlessness as the “Essence” of Absolute Knowledge

Heidegger offers what he thinks is the ultimate ground of the necessity of the phenomenological beginning in the second section of §6 of *HPS*. Recall that the question we now face is this: Why must absolute knowledge come to itself *first* through its other? If this question is answered to our satisfaction, a ground or justification will be provided for absolute knowledge’s necessary *parousia* at the phenomenological beginning. Heidegger’s response, in a nutshell, is that absolute knowledge *cannot but* come to itself first through its other because it is *essentially restless*. Let me try to illuminate this notion of restlessness as the absolute’s essence.

Heidegger points out the mistake of thinking of Hegelian absolute knowledge as a *completely* immediate presence, as “present (*gegenwärtig*) in its unified and developed absolute fullness.”<sup>54</sup> Although absolute knowledge does indeed have a presence as a totality or fullness, this presence is *never* only immediate: it is *always* a “mediated immediacy,”<sup>55</sup> or, if you prefer, a dynamic or *restless* structure. Heidegger associates this restlessness with the *how* (*das Wie*) of absolute knowledge, to wit, with *how* it is a totality or fullness or even just a presence. In order to really understand the absolute,

[i]t is not the absolute fullness and its absolute presence which is required but rather *the character and way of how the absolute is (die Art und Weise, wie das Absolute ist)*, the *absolute restlessness of mediation (die absolute Unruhe des Vermittelns)*, which alone can be *absolutely immediate....*<sup>56</sup>

The necessity of the phenomenological beginning derives from this character of the *how* of absolute knowledge as restlessness:

It is precisely so that the absolute should come to appear (*zum Vorschein kommen*) in the *Phenomenology* [namely, in such a way] that it designates (*zeigt*) the character and way (*die Art und Weise*) [of the absolute], *how it is absolute as absolute (wie es als Absolute absolut ist)*.<sup>57</sup>

The *how* of absolute knowledge is *constant* restlessness. This means: there is not even a single moment in the fullness of the absolute that the latter has a being that is not restless. This observation modifies slightly, but significantly, our earlier understanding of the notion of absolute. For now it becomes clear that Heidegger means this notion not only as the manner in which absolute knowledge will move from its attachment to consciousness at the phenomenological beginning to its explicit appearance at the logical beginning but also as the manner in which absolute knowledge *always* exists. In other words, Heidegger believes that, for Hegel, *each and every* moment of the absolute involves a certain act of absolute, a detachment or liberation from another moment. This is the mediation plaguing each and every immediacy.<sup>58</sup> It can also be said that there is not even a single moment of absolute knowledge, not even a single *positing*, not involving a *negation*. This is “the essence of the absolute.” Here are Heidegger’s words:

We shall be speaking of restless (*unruhig*) absolute knowledge as *absolvent* (in the sense of absolute). Then we can say that the essence of the absolute (*das Wesen des Absoluten*) is the in-finite absolving, and therein negativity and positivity are at the same time (*zugleich*) absolute or in-finite.<sup>59</sup>

“In-finite absolving” means constant *negation* of an other: only in this way a positivity can be posited. And since the “other” is already a negative, each and every positing is a negation of a negation, what Hegel calls “absolute negativity.” Yet, precisely because this process is constant or endless, the mirror side of absolute negativity is absolute positivity or, as Hegel calls it, “infinite affirmation.” In short, the absolute is an endless movement of absolute negativity and absolute affirmation. This movement is what Hegel labels “sublation” or “mediation”<sup>60</sup> or “absolute restlessness.” This is how Heidegger expresses it:

[S]ublation (*Aufheben*) ... is ... the way absolute knowledge occurs and is the character of that restlessness (*Unruhe*) which is the absolute [one] and which Hegel also calls “absolute negativity” (“*absolute Negativität*”) or “infinite affirmation” (“*unendliche Affirmation*”).<sup>61</sup>

Heidegger calls the restlessness—“the negation of the negation,” the “infinite affirmation,” the “sublation,” the “mediation” - of absolute knowledge “the inner law” (*inneres Gesetz*) of the *Phenomenology* and of Hegel’s system of science as a whole.<sup>62</sup>

How exactly does this appeal to restlessness as the essence of the absolute help Heidegger *justify* the necessity of the phenomenological beginning? Recall that he has already told us that the “appropriate” beginning of the system of science is *explicit* absolute knowledge, that is, absolute knowledge as liberated or absolved from consciousness. Yet, what we have now learned is that we should not understand this absolution as simply a process producing a result that is completely devoid of negation or, if you will, completely devoid of a *coming-to-itself-from-an-other*. A positing of an immediacy *always* involves a mediation, a coming-from-an-other.<sup>63</sup> This is entailed from absolute knowledge’s essence as restlessness. In fact, if absolute knowledge is to be truly restless, its immediate positing *has to* involve not only a coming-to-it-from-an-other, a movement *toward* the positing, but also a *projection from* it to an other, a movement *away* from the immediate positing or, if you prefer, a *negation* of it and the emergence of a new positivity. In short, each and every positing involves *in its very being* not only its sheer immediacy<sup>64</sup> but also a coming-to-it and a moving-away-from-it, both of which are exemplified as negation. Each and every immediate positing *is* a negation of a negation: the “is” here expresses a characteristic of an immediate positing (a moment of the absolute) that can *never* be removed from it.

It is, I think, now obvious why Heidegger thought that the appeal to restlessness helps with the justification of the necessity of the phenomenological beginning. For if absolute knowledge is truly restless, the positing of explicit absolute knowledge with which logic begins must involve not only the presence of an immediacy but also a coming from the other of such an immediacy (and also a moving away from such an immediacy). The other of explicit absolute knowledge is relative knowledge or consciousness, so the positing of consciousness and the “journey” from it to the positing of explicit absolute knowledge is a necessity. The *Phenomenology* simply makes manifest what the positing of the immediacy of absolute knowledge necessarily presupposes (or “pre-posit”). The same must be said of what follows this immediate positing, namely, the determinations following pure, indeterminate being in the *Logic*.

The following objection may be raised: why could the system of science not begin *only* with absolute knowledge’s immediacy at the logical beginning and then have absolute knowledge come back to it through

the dialectic of consciousness that is expounded in *the encyclopedic phenomenology* (which, if you recall, for Heidegger, is substantially the same as the 1807 phenomenology)? In this way, consciousness will be shown to be a *presupposition* of the logical beginning, without, however, functioning also as a *beginning* of the system. The objective of making manifest the “mediated immediacy” of the logical beginning will be achieved without using the, admittedly peculiar and rather paradoxical, expression of the system of science (the system of absolute knowledge) having *two* beginnings. Of course, in this case, the *Phenomenology* would prove to be an “error,” since the encyclopedic phenomenology would render it redundant. The *Phenomenology* has a place in the system of science only if it functions as a beginning of it and such a function is canceled out by the explanation of the “mediated immediacy” of the logical beginning through the process of the encyclopedic phenomenology’s leading to it.

This objection is false, however, exactly because the transition from the encyclopedic phenomenology to the logical beginning within the encyclopedia-system does *not* manifest a presupposition or a pre-positing—it only manifests a *return* to the immediacy of the logical beginning. This is so because in the encyclopedia-system the logical beginning has *already* been explicitly posited when the encyclopedic phenomenology emerges. The encyclopedic phenomenology, in other words, is not *manifestly shown* to *precede* the logical beginning. This is the reason why the latter’s presupposition is never manifested in the encyclopedia-system: it appears only as a *return* to it. On the contrary, in the phenomenology-system when the logical beginning is first explicitly posited, it has *already* been *shown* to be *preceded* by the 1807 phenomenology. Thus, the latter’s function as a presupposition or a pre-positing is clearly manifested. If Heidegger’s characterization of the essence of the Hegelian absolute as restlessness is correct, and if this restlessness entails the structure of a “mediated immediacy,” to wit, the impossibility of having an immediacy that is not linked to a presupposition (a coming-from) and a projection (a moving-away), it follows that the 1807 phenomenology is necessary to the system of science. For without it, the presupposition of the logical beginning *and hence the restlessness of absolute knowledge* would disappear from the system. The relation of phenomenology to the logical beginning would only be a *return* to it (rather than a presupposition of it).

Heidegger’s justification of the necessity of the phenomenological beginning is ingenious, as he capitalizes on the very real distinction between *exhibiting a presupposition* and *exhibiting a return*. The case made for the different relation the 1807 *Phenomenology* and the encyclopedic phenomenology, have to the logical beginning is quite convincing. Yet, another worry may be raised at this juncture. If, due to the restlessness of absolute knowledge, each and every positing requires a presupposing or a pre-positing, how is this *shown* with regards to the 1807 *Phenomenology*, in general, and the phenomenological beginning,

in particular? Is it not the case that by manifesting the presupposition of the logical beginning we establish the presuppositionlessness of the 1807 *Phenomenology*?

Heidegger does not himself give an explicit answer to this question, but a response does follow from the theses we have already encountered. It is true that, given the structure of the preceding argument, one would be obliged to assert that the phenomenological beginning is manifested as a sheer positing, since nothing is *shown* to *precede* it. But Heidegger has already told us that the 1807 *Phenomenology* is substantially the same as the encyclopedic phenomenology. Since the latter is *explicitly* preceded by logic, philosophy of nature, and a part of philosophy of spirit, its *presuppositions* are manifestly shown. Logic, philosophy of nature, and a part of the philosophy of spirit are posited *before* the emergence of the encyclopedic *Phenomenology*, so the transition from them to it is *not* a return: it is, rather, a *presupposing* or, if you prefer, a *grounding*. Yet, since the encyclopedic phenomenology is substantially the same as the 1807 *Phenomenology*, the latter's presuppositions are *also* exhibited in the *encyclopedia-system*. Indeed, what is manifested is that the 1807 *Phenomenology* presupposes logic, philosophy of nature, and a part of philosophy of spirit.

We now fully understand why Heidegger claims that Hegel's system of science *must* have *two* beginnings. For if it began only with logic, the presupposition of the logical beginning would not be made manifest, and, as a consequence, the restlessness of absolute knowledge would not become apparent. The logical beginning would appear presuppositionless, without involving a coming-from, and hence it would be—for a moment at least—at rest. The same could be said of logic as a whole: it would be a discipline presupposing nothing and hence a sphere enjoying a moment of rest. *Pure* logos, *pure* absolute knowledge would become the *ultimate* ground of the system of science. The beginning with phenomenology prevents all this, for it exhibits a movement toward and hence a grounding of logic, saving thereby the restlessness of absolute knowledge. But in order to avoid the danger of turning the phenomenological beginning into the ultimate ground of the system of science, Hegel ingeniously incorporates phenomenology into the system as a segment of the philosophy of spirit that manifestly presupposes logic, philosophy of nature and a part of philosophy of spirit. This proves the necessity of this incorporation—that is to say, it proves it *if* one accepts the claim that the essence of absolute knowledge is restlessness.

## 1.7 Conclusion

The article has discussed a significant aspect of Heidegger's interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, namely, his claim that it provides Hegel's system of science with a necessary first beginning. This

phenomenological beginning must precede the, equally necessary, second beginning provided by logic. Our discussion has concluded that Heidegger justifies his claim about the necessity of the phenomenological beginning by referring to the notion of the essence of absolute knowledge as restlessness. This is, for Heidegger, the ultimate ground of Hegel's system of science, the *Phenomenology* included. It is exactly what Heidegger has called "the inner law" that "enabl[es] us to attain the depth and fullness of the whole."

The discussion has disclosed the restlessness of absolute knowledge as the ultimate ground or justification of Heidegger's claim that the phenomenological beginning is necessary to Hegel's system of science. The necessity of this beginning is an *entailment* from the notion of that restlessness. Yet, one is obliged to ask: What is the ground or justification of *this* notion? Why *must* absolute knowledge be restless? This question never finds an explicit response in Heidegger's *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*—not even the response saying that Hegel posits this notion axiomatically or dogmatically outside of the system of science.<sup>65</sup> It certainly cannot be a *logical* principle—and therefore have logic as its ground—for then logic would become the ultimate ground of Hegel's system of science, undermining thus the very idea of the absolute's restlessness.

If we set aside this obvious defect of Heidegger's interpretation of the *Phenomenology*, its significance is not easily overlooked. What it establishes is that the system's ultimate ground is *not* the *immediate* positing of *pure* absolute knowledge. If Heidegger is right, it is not *pure* logos or the science of logic that grounds Hegel's system of science. Equally important is the discovery that the same holds for consciousness and phenomenology: they are not the ultimate ground of Hegel's system of science either. Neither pure logos nor the history of human consciousness grounds metaphysics, the domain of "the truth of being."

The ultimate ground of the truth of being is the absolute's restlessness, the "inner light" of science.<sup>66</sup> But where does *this* come from and why *must* it be? Heidegger remarks that reflection on absolute restlessness or "absolute actuality" "require[s] a *most original (ureigene)* adherence to the matter."<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, his discussion of "the problematic of the beginning with regard to Hegel"<sup>68</sup> in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* never reveals what such an adherence would look like.<sup>69</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); hereafter cited as *HPS*. I also refer to the original German text: Martin Heidegger, *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 32 (Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, 1980); hereafter cited as *HPG*.
- 2 *HPS*, p. 45/*HPG*, p. 63; I adopt the phrase "the *Phenomenology*" to refer to Hegel's book and the term *phenomenology* (without a definite article) to refer to the *Hegelian* discipline thematized by the book.



- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 HPS, p. 45/HPG, p. 64.
- 7 HPS, pp. 37, 39/HPG, pp. 54, 57.
- 8 HPS, pp. 11, 17, 25–26, 126, 130–131/HPG, pp. 15–16, 24, 35–36, 182–183, 186–188.
- 9 HPS, p. 14/HPG, p. 20.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 HPS, p. 14/HPG, p. 21.
- 16 HPS, p. 15/HPG, p. 21.
- 17 HPS, p. 47/HPG, p. 66.
- 18 HPS, p. 15/HPG, p. 21.
- 19 HPS, p. 47/HPG, p. 66.
- 20 The distinction between an absolute and an explicit beginning reminds us of Heidegger's distinction between the beginning taken as a starting point and the beginning taken as an origin. See Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1980), pp. 3–4. See also Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," in Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1972), p. 7, where Heidegger identifies the beginning-as-origin with the *essence* of that which begins.
- 21 HPS, p. 40/HPG, p. 57.
- 22 HPS, p. 34/HPG, p. 40.
- 23 HPS, pp. 2–9/HPG, pp. 2–13. I follow here the practice of Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, the translators of *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, who write the first letters of "phenomenology-system" and "encyclopedia-system" with small letters.
- 24 HPS, p. 3/HPG, p. 4. See also Martin Heidegger, "Elucidation of the 'Introduction' to Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Spirit'," in Martin Heidegger, *Hegel*, trans. Joseph Arel and Niels Feuerhahn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 56.
- 25 A detailed account of the logical beginning can be found in Ioannis Trisokkas, *Pyrrhonian Scepticism and Hegel's Theory of Judgement* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 93–117. See also Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2006), pp. 29–32, 263–268; Robb Dunphy, "Hegel and the Problem of Beginning," *Hegel Bulletin*, forthcoming; and Robb Dunphy, "On the Incompatibility of Hegel's Phenomenology with the Beginning of his Logic," *Review of Metaphysics* 74 (2020), 81–119.
- 26 HPS, p. 3/HPG, p. 4.
- 27 HPS, p. 6/HPG, p. 9.
- 28 HPS, p. 7/HPG, pp. 9–10.
- 29 HPS., p. 6/HPG, p. 8.
- 30 HPS, p. 6/HPG, p. 9.
- 31 HPS, p. 7/HPG 9, my emphasis.
- 32 Heidegger, "Elucidation," p. 55: "In terms of its doctrinal content the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has remained the same in the Encyclopedia system."
- 33 HPS, pp. 8–9/HPG, pp. 10–11.
- 34 Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 28, 47.
- 35 HPS, p. 2/HPG, p. 3.

- 36 Ibid.
- 37 HPS, p. 9/HPG, p. 12.
- 38 HPS, p. 8, my emphasis/HPG, p. 11.
- 39 HPS, p. 15/HPG, p. 21.
- 40 Ibid., my emphasis.
- 41 Robert Sinnerbrink, "Sein und Geist: Heidegger's Confrontation with Hegel's *Phenomenology*," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 3 (2007), p. 140.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Sinnerbrink, "Sein und Geist" p. 142.
- 45 This is not to say that Heidegger's understanding of Hegel's "we" in the *Phenomenology* does not require our attention and extensive discussion. All I am suggesting here is that Heidegger's interpretation of the *Phenomenology* does not rest entirely on his understanding of the function of the "we" therein.
- 46 HPS, pp. 30, 47–49, 50–51/ HPG, pp. 43, 65–68, 71.
- 47 HPS, p. 32/HPG, p. 47.
- 48 In the first five sections (§§1–5) of HPS Heidegger develops an argument from the meaning of the term *science*—a term included in the original title of the *Phenomenology*—whose purpose is to establish the presence of the absolute at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*. I have elsewhere shown that this "philological" argument is unsuccessful; see Ioannis Trisokkas, "Phenomenology as Metaphysics: On Heidegger's Interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy* (forthcoming).
- 49 HPS, p. 32/HPG, p. 47. See also Heidegger, HPS, p. 45/HPG, p.63: "The history of spirit happens in a movement characterized as coming to itself (*Zusichselbstkommen*) ..."
- 50 HPS, p. 33/HPG, p. 47, my emphasis; Heidegger's emphasis has been removed.
- 51 Ibid., my emphasis; Heidegger's emphasis has been removed.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 HPS., p. 51/HPG, p. 71.
- 55 HPS., pp. 52–53/HPG, p. 74: "[The] beginning with the immediate is already no longer an immediate beginning. It is not only for Hegel that the beginning is not an immediate one; philosophy itself can never begin immediately, but always begins with mediation." See also HPS, p. 53/HPG, p. 74: "[T]here is generally nothing like pure immediate description in philosophy."
- 56 HPS, p. 51/HPG, p. 71 translation slightly modified.
- 57 Ibid., my translation.
- 58 Heidegger characterizes our thought of an "immediate knowledge" as a "condescension" (*herbeilassen*) that we should not take too seriously; see HPS, p. 48/HPG, p. 67. Three sentences later he speaks of the "condescension" of mediation, of sublation *itself* to "what is *un*-mediated, precisely in order to *mediate* it." See also HPS, p. 52/HPG, p. 73, where Heidegger remarks that "if this [absolute] knowledge is really *absolute*, then in no way—not even at the beginning—can it be dependent upon the surrender of an object which is independent of this knowledge." He says this of sense-certainty, which, although it explicitly presents the cognitive relation to an independent object of knowledge, is implicitly determined by absolute knowledge. This implicitness is the result of phenomenology's having the whole system of science as its presupposition (yet, this becomes apparent only in the encyclopedia-system).
- 59 HPS, p. 51/HPG, p. 72.

- 60 Heidegger clearly identifies “sublation” (*Aufhebung*) and mediation (*Vermitteln*) in *HPS*, p. 48/*HPG*, p. 67 (translation modified): “the dominion of mediation, of sublation.”
- 61 *HPS*, p. 47/*HPG*, p. 66, translation slightly modified.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Any “at first,” Heidegger contends, should be understood “in [a] sequence (*Abfolge*) within [a] progression (*Weiterfolgen*) ...;” “only in this way can the ‘at first’ be determined” (*HPS*, p. 46/*HPG* p. 65, my translation). See also *HPS*, p. 48/*HPG*, p. 67 (translation slightly modified): “The immediate ... always already stands under the dominion of mediation, of sublation.”
- 64 This “sheer immediacy,” Heidegger tells us, is the moment in which the movement of absolute knowledge “to some extent ... rests;” see *HPS*, p. 48/*HPG*, p. 67. Yet, note that this rest is *always* irreducibly connected to restlessness. It is, if you will, *constantly* intrinsically linked to a coming-from and a moving-toward.
- 65 Nevertheless, it may be so that Heidegger supports the understanding of absolute restlessness as an “ungrounded” or “dogmatic” ground. This may be his intention at the very end of *HPS*, where he speaks of “the leap (*Sprung*) into the whole of the absolute” and wonders if this leap is “all that is left”; see *HPS*, p. 149/*HPG*, p. 215.
- 66 *HPS*, p. 51/*HPG*, p. 72.
- 67 *HPS*, p. 53/*HPG*, p. 75.
- 68 *HPS*, p. 53/*HPG*, p. 74.
- 69 I express my gratitude to Sebastian Stein and Ivan Boldyrev, the editors of this volume, for acute and enormously helpful comments on a previous version of this chapter.

## 2 “Now is the Night”

### Deixis in Hegel and Maldiney

*Anna Yampolskaya*

The first chapter of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is called “Die sinnliche Gewißheit oder das Diese und das Meinen” (Sensuous-Certainty; or the “This” and Meaning Something).<sup>1</sup> As the title suggests, Hegel relates sense experience to the meaning of deictic expressions. As a matter of fact, the problem of sense experience as such will soon disappear from Hegel’s analysis; the question of *sensuous* is dissolved in the question of *certainty* which, in its turn, is taken over by the investigation of the *immediate* and its linguistic manifestations. The problem of sense experience is thus reduced to the question of whether deictic expressions provide suitable means to deal with this immediacy. Hegel looks for the meaning of deixis; however, he would not be content with just any meaning. Such a meaning should be stable and permanent; there is no surprise that he comes to the conclusion that deictic expressions cannot serve this purpose. This is achieved by a sort of linguistic argument which subsequent development of linguistics has made look questionable.

In this chapter, I discuss Henri Maldiney’s critique<sup>2</sup> of this crucially important inaugural chapter of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In line with the postwar French thought, Maldiney offers a reading of Hegel that involves a blend of post-Husserlian phenomenology, structural linguistics and psychopathology. He was influenced by Heidegger, but also by the linguist Emile Benveniste and by the psychiatrist Erwin Straus. In Straus’s opus magnum, *Vom Sinn der Sinne* (1935)<sup>3</sup>, Maldiney finds inspiration for his novel approach to sensuous experience, while Benveniste’s investigations of personal pronouns<sup>4</sup> provide Maldiney with material arguments against Hegel’s (mis)interpretation of deixis.

Maldiney himself is partly to blame for his relative lack of recognition in the English-speaking world.<sup>5</sup> His writing is dense and highly metaphorical; his arguments require a significant effort on the part of the reader. On a number of points I had to complement Maldiney’s statements with additional arguments to make his ideas work. The main points of Maldiney’s critique of Hegel can be summarised as follows. Deixis cannot be considered separately from sense experience, on the one hand, and from communication, on the other hand. Hegel turns a blind

eye to the communicative dimension of sense experience and of deixis since it does not fit into his epistemological framework. As a result, he overlooks the fact that deictic expressions do have a general meaning which is fixated in the event of speaking. Hegel thus reduces language to its descriptive function and does not take into account the pragmatic dimension of human speech. These are naïve assumptions, residues of the common consciousness that have to be pinpointed and eventually reversed in order to reach a true beginning for the phenomenology of sense experience. Hegel's initial analysis of sense certainty was only a "false start," concludes Maldiney.

Let me briefly outline my arguments presented in this chapter.

In the first section, I clarify Maldiney's claim that deixis should be considered in the context of common sensuous and affective experience of the shared world. I explore Straus's influence on Maldiney regarding the communicative dimension of sense experience and show that it is the shared character of sense experience that makes deixis possible as such. In the second section, I discuss Hegel's experiment with writing down the statement "now is the night" and expose its logical structure. I relate this experiment to the question of whether the adverbs *here* and *now*, as well as the personal pronoun *I*, have a general meaning, invoking the work of Husserl and Benveniste. The last section is devoted to Maldiney's alternative treatment of deixis and his concept of subjectivity that emerges when deictic expressions are used. Deictic expressions have some features of a performative speech act; it is due to the explosive power of deixis that a simple communication can exceed the framework of information exchange and become an encounter where a new subject and a new world are born.

Maldiney's reading of Hegel was discussed by Dastur<sup>6</sup> and Tinland,<sup>7</sup> who explore the phenomenological side of Maldiney's arguments without engaging with his analysis of deixis. In this chapter, I cannot discuss the extensive development of Hegelian theory of deixis in analytical philosophy. For more details, see Dulckeit's work<sup>8</sup> and the literature mentioned therein.

## 2.1 Sensuous-Certainty and the Shared World of Sense Experience

For Hegel, the unfolding of knowing is the only true object of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Hence the importance of the critique of sensuous-certainty: indeed, this critique constitutes the first transition from the knowledge of a particular object to the knowing of this knowledge. The detachment of knowing from the knowledge of its particular object and its particular subject is the nerve of the first chapter of *Phenomenology of Spirit* which considers sensuous-certainty exclusively as a mode of cognition. The deictic *This!* points to an object of cognition but falls short of representing it in its essence.

Maldiney's starting point is entirely different. As a good phenomenologist, he tries to grasp sense experience as it gives itself, that is, in its manifold modes of appearance,<sup>10</sup> including those which are not related to cognition. Indeed, deictic *This!* expresses a basic form of sensuous contact with the world, but this contact has its own mode of phenomenality which differs from the phenomenality of an object. This point alone constitutes a substantial departure from Hegel's posing of the problem.<sup>11</sup> Discarding the primacy of theoretical attitude, Maldiney frees himself from the obligation to follow Hegel in his most decisive gesture, that is, to understand sensibility exclusively in terms of spirit.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the sensuous world does not appear to the disembodied spirit: it appears to us, that is, to the embodied, living human beings who share with one another the experience of the world.<sup>13</sup> Sense experience involves practical as well as aesthetic engagement with the world which I share with others. To sense the world and the things of the world is to communicate with others.

In a nutshell, this claim is already present in Erwin Straus's brief remark on sensuous-certainty:

Was bedeutet es, wenn ich in der Absicht, jemand auf irgend etwas nur kurz Sichtbares aufmerksam zu machen, „jetzt“ und „jetzt“ rufe? An was appelliere ich? An die Gemeinschaft unseres Erlebens.<sup>14</sup>

Straus argues that sensuous-certainty should be seen as a part of a "total relation" of an embodied being (a human being or an animal) to the world as a whole. Sensuous-certainty is a key feature of this "total relation"; however, one should not reduce it to a mere handling of sensations, to the processing of sensuous stimuli. The sensuous contact with the world, which Straus calls 'sense experience' (*das Empfinden*) gives me both "myself *and* the other, myself *and* the world".<sup>15</sup> What is the precise meaning of the conjunction in this statement? This conjunction, says Straus, is not just a sum of the subject and the object that puts them together to form a compound.<sup>16</sup> This conjunction designates an interaction between the I and the world. I am not just together with the world: I live in the world, which is orientated and demarcated by my being in it; the world affects me and I affect the world. Sense experience is a "symbiotic relation"<sup>17</sup> between me and the world. Only on the basis of this symbiosis with the world I can grasp the expression of another human or animal being, only on the basis of this symbiosis I can communicate with the others. However, this symbiotic experience of the world which I share with other living creatures stays private or semi-private: it is not the world *stricto sensu* which I access in sense experience; it is an environment only (*Umwelt*). It is this private character of the world that is expressed in deixis: when I say 'now', I mean 'my now' or rather 'our now': a particular, unique, non-repeatable moment of the world as a

“world for me”.<sup>18</sup> If I need to access the universal world of knowledge, of memory and of doubt, I need to break free from the symbiotic relation, to dissociate myself from the being-with (*Mitsein*);<sup>19</sup> a relation with the other presupposes a certain degree of separation.

Straus seems to suggest that his descriptions agree with Hegel’s analysis of sensuous-certainty, perhaps even follow from it. In contrast to Straus, Maldiney reads these descriptions as an argument against Hegel. According to him, Hegel does not distinguish between the world of sense experience and the “objective universe”.<sup>20</sup> Drawing on Straus’s ideas, Maldiney puts a stress on essential intersubjectivity of sense experience which opens to us not just an *idios kosmos* or an *Umwelt* but also the world as a whole. While my sensations stay private, the sense experience is a shared experience: “we can go sight-seeing together; we attend together to the same show; we listen to the same speaker; we drive on the same road,” notices Straus,<sup>21</sup> but for Straus, this semi-private world of shared experience is only a common environment (*Umwelt*), not yet the world as a whole.<sup>22</sup> For Maldiney, the preconceptual layer of shared sense experience is the “original” layer of a properly human experience wherein one may communicate with the world as a whole.<sup>23</sup> This layer of experience is meaningful (*signifiant*), although not in a way the experience of objects can be meaningful to us:<sup>24</sup> its meaning does not concern *what* is experienced but only *how* it is experienced. Such a meaning can hardly be translated into knowledge, but it can be expressed in art: it is this *how* of experience that is made visible in painting. Deixis, as well as art, introduces to us the world as a whole; *what* is pointed out refers to *how* it appears, to its mode of givenness. However, a mode of givenness is not something purely subjective: in any particular mode of givenness of a particular object, the whole world is revealed to us. Deixis expresses the reality of what is subjective.

Maldiney’s observation that deixis should be analysed within the framework of the communicative dimension of sense experience, which opens to us the world as a whole could be advanced one step further. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (also influenced by Straus) gives a slightly different description of the same phenomenon. I suggest that this description indicates a missing link in Maldiney’s analysis of sensuous-certainty:

If a friend and I are standing before a landscape, and if I attempt to show my friend something which I see and which he does not yet see, we cannot account for the situation by saying that I see something in my own world and that I attempt, by sending verbal messages, to give rise to an analogous perception in the world of my friend. There are not two numerically distinct worlds plus a mediating language which alone would bring us together. There is—and I know it very well if I become impatient with him—a kind of demand that what I see be seen by him also. And at the same time this communication is

required by the very thing which I am looking at, by the reflections of sunlight upon it, by its color, by its sensible evidence. The thing imposes itself not as true for every intellect, but as *real* for every subject who is standing where I am.<sup>25</sup>

Merleau-Ponty uses this description to highlight the insufficiency of empiricist and intellectualist accounts of perception; here he is not concerned with the relation of sense experience to the expression of this experience; however, he also emphasises the 'reality' of shared sense experience. What appears to me and to a certain extent even how it appears to me transcends the purely subjective layer of experience: the very existence of deixis proves that sense experience can be shared with others. It is this shared reality that makes deixis possible; deixis suggests and confirms the communicative character of sense experience.

Let me summarise. Drawing on Straus's work, Maldiney shows that the analysis of sense experience reveals that I, as an embodied subject of this experience, live in the world and share the world with others. According to Maldiney, it is the communicative character of sense experience that is missing in Hegel's handling of sensuous-certainty and of deixis. The world is much more than just a sum of epistemic objects; the "primordial disclosure"<sup>26</sup> of the world in the sensuous and affective experience cannot be reduced to one and only mode of manifestation, that is, to the manifestation of an object to a subject of knowledge. Deixis expresses our common belonging to the world as a whole. Sensuous-certainty as a relation of knowledge between the I as the *singular individual* (*der Einzelne*) and "a pure this", *the singular* (PS §91), should not be considered independently of my belonging to the shared world which constitutes a necessary condition of both deixis and sense experience.

Now I would like to consider the question, 'What is This?' or, rather, 'What is expressed in deictic *This!*?' The answer to this question depends on what we mean by *expressing* and how we understand language in general.

## 2.2 Deixis as an Expression of the Singular: (The) Now Is the Night

It is language that supplies Hegel with a negative criterion of truth: what cannot be said, cannot be true.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Hegel insists that the experience of the singular cannot be represented in words, that the fleeting character of singularity resists our attempts to fix it on paper. Therefore, concludes Hegel, it cannot be *expressed*, it cannot be represented in words and consequently it has no truth: "it is, in that way, not possible at all that we could say what we *mean* about sensuous being... it is impossible to state this" (PS §97, §102). What we are able to express is the universal, not the singular. This conclusion is illustrated by a very specific thought



experiment with writing down the truth of sensuous-certainty. Maldiney argues that this experiment is based on a restrictive view of what language is, that is, on the reduction of speech to language.<sup>28</sup> All the aspects of speech communication that cannot be rendered without a reference to the very event of interaction between the interlocutors are ignored or at least played down by Hegel.

Let us have a closer look at Hegel's famous experiment. The truth of sensuous-certainty takes the form of a statement: "now is the night". This statement can well be true when one is writing it down, but the written statement will become false the next morning. Therefore, concludes Hegel, one cannot express the truth of sensuous-certainty by means of deictic expressions (demonstrative adverbs and personal pronouns). What is the logical structure of this argument? The supposed truth of sensuous-certainty is expressed in a very peculiar form: "The '*Now*' is the night".<sup>29</sup> Hegel applies the definite article to the adverb in order to introduce a tacit shift between the common meaning of the word *now* and its new, philosophical meaning. Yet he does not clarify what he means by 'the now'. Apparently, while the meaning of the adverb *now* (*jetzt*) is supposedly obvious (it describes "the point in time",<sup>30</sup> plainly comments Heidegger), 'the Now' (*das Jetzt*), the substantiated now, refers to the meaning of now "itself in itself,"<sup>31</sup> that is, to the meaning that can be universal. This experiment makes sense only if one knows the 'true' meaning of 'now', that is, what 'now' refers to. A different issue is whether one can use 'the now' in place of 'now': the statement 'the now is the night' should have a meaning identical to the meaning of the common expression 'now is the night'. Similar questions should be raised concerning the usage of 'I' and 'the I'. So the premises of Hegel's argument can be stated as follows:

1. the reference and the meaning of the adverb *now* and the pronoun *I* were determined correctly by Hegel;
2. the *meaning* of the substantiated 'now' and of the substantiated 'I' can be deduced from the *use* of the adverb *now* and the pronoun *I*.

The failure of the experiment leads Hegel to reject the second premise. Once the definition based on the linguistic function of deictic expression fails, Hegel feels justified in bringing the conceptual definition forward. The true meaning of 'the now', the universal that mediates the singular, would reflect "a plurality of Now taken together" (PS §107). In the final run, such a meaning would have little to do with the meaning of the adverb *now* and the personal pronoun *I* as used in effective communication.

Maldiney, however, focuses on what I called the first premise, the one that Hegel does not put into question. In order to scrutinise Hegel's logic, he appeals to the analysis of deixis in Husserl and Benveniste.

Husserl's analysis of the so-called occasional statements (i.e., statements that contain deictic expressions) does not explicitly refer to the

first chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but it can be seen as a step towards a solution of the general problem of deictic expressions in philosophy. In his *Logical Investigations* (1901), Husserl expresses his doubt that one can legitimately use "occasional statements" within philosophical argumentation at all, because, he argues, their meaning is "ambiguous".<sup>32</sup> The meaning of a statement containing the adverbs *now* and *here* or the pronoun *I*<sup>33</sup> cannot be determined once and for all as it cannot be "understood without directing one's attention to the person uttering it, or to the circumstances of the uttering".<sup>34</sup> However, Husserl's analysis goes one step further than Hegel's: he almost succeeds in his pioneering attempt to deduce the meaning of occasional statements from their use. Husserl claims that occasional statements have a *double meaning*, one meaning "built upon" another "in a peculiar fashion": the general meaning,<sup>35</sup> which is indicated, and the singular meaning, which is indicating.<sup>36</sup> Husserl gives an example: the meaning of the adverb *here*. The "general function of the word [is] to name the spatial environment of the speaker", but "to this universal element" attaches something else, something particular: the direct place-presentation.<sup>37</sup> Maldiney comments: "Husserl superposes what Hegel opposes: the singularity and the universality of the self-consciousness"<sup>38</sup> and he concludes that the distance between Hegel and Husserl is not as substantial as it may seem.<sup>39</sup> This is not entirely correct, because Hegel's understanding of the universal differs from Husserl's "general meaning". For Hegel, the fact that deictic expressions lack stable meanings and thus cannot be used in propositions that one would like to be universally true implies that deictic expressions lack *general function*, while Husserl does not hesitate to identify the "general function" of occasional statements as rooted "in the circumstances of the uttering,"<sup>40</sup> that is, in the circumstances of the act of verbal communication. Of course, the decisive step made by Jakobson and Benveniste, that is, establishing a link between the general meaning of deictic expressions and the *event of speaking* ('message' or 'instance of discourse') is yet to be achieved.

Writing down "(the) now is the night" in order to read this statement the next morning, Hegel *writes a letter to himself*, but he avoids interpreting it as a letter. He considers the statement "(the) now is the night" out of the context of communication, and he does not take into account the link between the meaning of this statement and the speech event in which this statement takes place. Following Benveniste, Maldiney insists that deixis can only be understood in the context of a certain communication, albeit a communication with oneself, and not from the linguistic code only (to use Jakobson's terminology). In order to express the singular, one certainly needs to fixate it, but this fixation is achieved in the communication itself, not in recording it.<sup>41</sup> And although one cannot *represent* the singular in words, although one cannot *describe* it without referring to the event of communication, one can still *express* it. The general meaning of deictic expressions is not ineffable, "unsayable" (PS §110). Hegel

refers to the authority of language, to the way deictic expressions are used, but his position is not fully consistent. Jean Hyppolite was right when he pointed out that “one of the profound defects in Hegel’s thought is revealed perhaps in his philosophy of language”,<sup>42</sup> and, indeed, in his belief that the deictic expressions lack general meaning.

Hegel’s analysis of sensuous-certainty focuses on the investigation of deixis understood as an expression of an immediate relation to the singular. For Maldiney, sense experience involves presence and co-presence rather than immediacy and certainty. Unlike Hegel, for whom the immediacy of deixis is ineffable, Maldiney suggests that the inchoative layer of sense experience, which is expressed in deixis, is valuable in itself and not only as a step towards perception; self-transcending is also not so much a work of mediation, determination and alienation but of ‘encounter’ and ‘event’ that are proper to sense experience as such.

### 2.3 From Subjectivity in Discourse to Intersubjectivity in Sense Experience

The supposed inability of language to express the singular *as* singular without recourse to the universal plays a key role in Hegel’s analysis of alienation. Here again, an important role is assigned to deictic expressions but in a different sense. The meaning of the deictic I is mediated by the universal I, and it is only due to this mediation that self-consciousness can recognise itself as universal and existing for the others. Hegel writes:

[L]anguage contains the I [Ich] in its purity; it alone expresses the I itself. This, its *existence*, is, as *existence*, an objectivity which has its true nature in language. The I is *this* I [*Ich ist dieses Ich*]*—but is just as much universal*. Its appearance is just as much the self-relinquishing and the disappearance of *this* I, and, as a result, its remaining in its universality.

(PS §507)

Here again, Hegel has recourse to the resources of language which becomes a tool of alienation. We are unable to distinguish between deictic I (*dieses Ich*) and the universal I which gradually supplants it. The development of experience involves the emergence of a new object for consciousness: the I that recognises itself *as* universal. As Jean Hyppolite puts it,

[t]The function of language is precisely to say the I, to make the I itself a universal.... In saying “I,” I say what every other I can say. I simultaneously express myself and alienate myself; I become objective.... Not only does the individual renounce his natural existence so as to form himself through service; he also alienates himself in

expressing himself. He says *what* he is and in so doing he becomes universal. He can then discover himself only as a universal being.<sup>43</sup>

Language, according to Hegel, is deemed to express *what* one is, not *who* one is: it is under this condition that language is able to "make spirit appear as the self-conscious unity of individuals".<sup>44</sup> There is a price to pay: the universal I introduced by Hegel can only be "a quasi-subject", "a subjectless voice traversing all subjects".<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the universal I cannot take the position of the speaking subject in communication;<sup>46</sup> it is a construction and not a description. The permanence of meaning of this universal I is the "permanence of concept"<sup>47</sup> whose "essence is determined prior to discourse"<sup>48</sup>: to have a meaning is to refer to a certain *objectivity* that can be defined using semantic resources of language only.

However, this attempt to deal with I as a concept is quite problematic, as was pointed out by Benveniste:

There is no concept 'I' that incorporates all the I's that are uttered at every moment in the mouths of all speakers, in the sense that there is a concept "tree" to which all the individual uses of *tree* refer.... Then, what does *I* refer to? ... The reality to which it refers is the reality of the discourse.<sup>49</sup>

The "reality of discourse" is neither a concept nor an individual; it is an act of speaking. To say 'I' is to perform an act, to lay a foundation and, finally, to create something new. Expressing myself, I constitute myself,<sup>50</sup> comments Maldiney: the subjectivity *emerges* in this act.<sup>51</sup> Thus, a simple deixis acquires certain features of a performative speech act.<sup>52</sup>

In order to grasp this emerging character of subjectivity, Maldiney appeals to a distinction between a *speaking* word (*parole parlante*) and a *spoken* word (*parole parlée*) as introduced by Merleau-Ponty.<sup>53</sup> While the spoken word "enjoys available significances as one might enjoy an acquired fortune",<sup>54</sup> the speaking word expresses meanings *in statu nascendi*. Maldiney introduces a similar distinction between a speaking I and a spoken I. Like Merleau-Ponty, Maldiney does not really oppose two conflicting realities but rather points out two different aspects of the same phenomenon. Hegel's analysis pays due attention to the spoken I but completely ignores the speaking I. The speaking I is not an *object* of speech, comments Maldiney,<sup>55</sup> because it does not relate to the already stabilised, sedimented layer of experience. The speaking I as well as the sentient I shares with sense experience one of its key features, that is, its inchoateness: it is an I which is "not yet crystallised into object".<sup>56</sup> As such, it does not coincide with the I that has spoken, the I that already established its place in the world. While the speaking I lacks stability and permanence because the event of speaking catches I *in actu*, it carries in itself a potential for renewal and novelty.

Following Benveniste, Maldiney interprets deixis as a generalised speech act that produces the speaking subject who performs this very act. Maldiney also seems to suggest that deixis inaugurates the situation of communication wherein it takes place. This paradox is remarkable. On one hand, deixis, as noted earlier, is possible due to the fact that our sense experience is a shared experience, and as such, it can be communicated. On the other hand, the communicative situation itself, understood as an encounter of two singularities, arises in the performative act of deixis. The conditions of the act are constituted in the act itself.

In this context, it can be fruitful to compare Maldiney's arguments to Husserl's approach in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Husserl argues that when I point at *this*, that is, at a singular object, I also co-intend the infinite horizon of the experienced world that I share with others.<sup>57</sup> The meaning of an occasional judgement depends on the situational horizons that are common to all participants of a particular practical situation. Husserl insists that the meaning of occasional statements is determined by the typical aspects of the situation.<sup>58</sup> It is because the meaning is typical that it is immediately accessible to all who find themselves in a particular situation. Maldiney's position is far more nuanced. For him, deixis is inaugural: in it, the speaking I steps outside her possibilities; it is a founding act in which a new world is created.<sup>59</sup>

Maldiney's treatment of singularity can be described in terms of attaching a mark, a tag or a label. By fixating the singularity of interlocutors in a kind of speech act and simultaneously producing this singularity in the same act, *deixis transforms a typical situation into a unique one*—the one that can only take place here and now, between you and me. Space and time are no longer anonymous forms of sensibility; they become our own space and time where we are co-present to one another.<sup>60</sup> Benveniste asserts that, in deixis, the speaker "appropriates" language.<sup>61</sup> In the spirit of Maldiney's arguments, one could say that a "typical" situation of communication is "appropriated" in deixis and becomes a unique encounter of two singularities.

The speaking I is self-referential; that is, it designates itself as 'I'; my interlocutor is designated as 'you' in the same movement. You and I, as designated you and designated I, we both emerge in the same event of speaking and in that same event our shared world emerges<sup>62</sup> as ours, as designated and unique. This shared world is a new, different world: its structure of meaning underwent a significant change. Deixis expresses the birth of this new world, which is the world as a whole and not just an environment. The intersubjective situation as 'between you and me' is not a result of prior emergence of the subjectivity in discourse; neither does it precede this emergence as a common, already pregiven world-horizon; they are born in the same event. When I say 'I', I do not refer to my self-consciousness, nor to the self-consciousness of the other which is presumably similar to my self-consciousness; I speak in the *presence* of the other<sup>63</sup> as incarnated.

Maldiney insists that one can access a new meaning of the world and of oneself only in an encounter: in an encounter which is always an encounter with otherness.<sup>64</sup> A mere interjection "this!" could provoke an encounter where I potentially meet another human being not as an object of my cognition, not as a particular case of a certain social role,<sup>65</sup> not as another self-consciousness but as the other. Such an encounter may release me from the web of my own thoughts, fears and hopes where I am confined: I may break free from the space of my own possibilities. It is not negativity but, rather, a communication with another human being, with the world and with the work of art<sup>66</sup> that may bring us self-transcendence and mobility of thinking, these two main ambitions of Hegel's philosophy.

## 2.4 Conclusion

Both Hegel and post-Husserlian phenomenology agree that sensuous-certainty belongs to the pre-reflective and preconceptual level of sense experience and that the content of this experience is not immediately graspable in conceptual terms. However, their conclusions differ. For Hegel, the inability of the sensuous-certainty to express its knowledge in conceptual terms means that the initial claim of sensuous-certainty to be "the richest cognition" has to be left behind as a mere belief, a mere *doxa* that can participate in his transcendental quest for knowledge only as a starting point. The transcendental structure of experience uncovered by the analysis of sensuous-certainty can be formulated as follows: we cannot grasp the truth of the particular without the mediation of the universal. On the contrary, for Husserl and his followers this pre-reflective, pre-conceptual layer of experience finds its legitimate place within the transcendental phenomenology *nova methodo*.<sup>67</sup> This became possible due to the radical reinterpretation of the transcendental which involves the revalorisation of the "disparaged *doxa*".<sup>68</sup> Husserl indeed "brings the transcendental and the empirical closer than ever before";<sup>69</sup> however, the empirical material has to be radically reconceptualised in order to become an integral part of his transcendental project. The non-conceptual is no longer questioned about its presumable conceptual *content* (as Hegel did with the sensuous-certainty). The analysis of content, of 'what', is replaced by the analysis of 'how', by the analysis of the structure and the function of the pre-conceptual: *how* this pre-reflective and pre-conceptual layer of experience appears to the consciousness, *how* it is constituted and *how* it participates in the constitution of the new layers of meaning, of the "new layer of consciousness".<sup>70</sup> All the post-Husserlian phenomenology shares this methodological approach that sharply distinguishes it from the Hegelian treatment of the same problem. It is this methodological difference that is accountable for the divergence in the results.

Maldiney often refers to a story of Eugène Minkowski's schizophrenic patient who was able to say he was 'there', but being 'there' meant nothing

to him.<sup>71</sup> For Maldiney, these words not only express the troubled psychological state of this particular person; in a negative way, they also unveil a basic “human possibility”, that is, the possibility to belong to the shared world and to make sense of this belonging.<sup>72</sup> This is exactly the situation in which Hegelian subject of sensuous-certainty finds herself: she knows that she is ‘here’ and ‘now’, but she knows this objectively; she does not grasp these ‘here’ and ‘now’ from her sense experience which is left behind in going over to the theoretical attitude. Maldiney, and to some point Straus and Benveniste before him, succeeded in pinpointing this layer of meaning which was deemed to be irrelevant by their predecessors. They achieved this thanks to the descriptive and functional approach pioneered by Husserl, on one hand, and by the theorists of structuralism, on the other. Hegel’s investigation of deixis launches the dynamics of thinking which becomes an experience in its own right. However, these dynamics are associated with the permanent changing of the object of experience: Hegel does not return to the *pre-reflective* layer of sense experience because for him, it belongs to a lower step in the hierarchy of the forms of consciousness. For Maldiney, sense experience expressed in deixis also serves as a starting point for a phenomenological description of the dynamics of experience, but what is mobile here is not the experience of thinking, but sense experience itself and the associated structures of meaning formation. Only when one asks ‘how does sense experience work’ or ‘how does it affect me as an embodied being sharing the world with others’, one can grasp the true meaning of this ‘richness’ of sensuous-certainty which Hegel mentions in the beginning of the first chapter.<sup>73</sup> It is not sensuous-certainty as a mode of cognition that could be “of infinite wealth” but sense experience understood as a primordial mode of phenomenality which unlocks the shared world as it is and how it is.

Maldiney provides a philosophical rehabilitation of a “natural, immediate, individual subjectivity ... a subjectivity ... tied to this space and to this time, dependent on contingent circumstances”,<sup>74</sup> a subjectivity of sense experience and of deictic cry “here it is”. What appears to Hegel to be a lower, primitive, undeveloped or even bestial state of the soul is, in fact, a complex fundamental layer of human subjectivity, a birthplace of new meanings, where the very possibility of linguistic, ethical and aesthetic experience is grounded.<sup>75</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated and Edited by Terry Pinkard. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2018).
- 2 Henry Maldiney. « La méconnaissance du sentir et de la première parole ou la faux départ de la phénoménologie de Hegel ». In *Regard, Parole, Espace* (Paris: Cerf, 2013, first edition 1973), pp. 323–400. See also Henry Maldiney. *Penser l'homme et la folie* (Grenoble: Jérôme Million, 1991). pp. 31–35.

- 3 Erwin Straus. *Vom Sinn der Sinne. Ein Beitrag zur Grundlegung der Psychologie*. (Berlin: Springer, 1978, first edition 1935).
- 4 Émile Benveniste. "Man and language". In *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek (University of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 195–248.
- 5 For an introduction to Maldiney's ideas in English see Éliane Escoubas. "Henry Maldiney". In *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*. Edited by H. Sepp and L. Embree (London: Springer, 2010), pp. 193–196.
- 6 Françoise Dastur. « Henri Maldiney lecteur de Hegel ». *Philosophie* 3 (2016), pp. 23–37.
- 7 Olivier Tinland, « Y a-t-il un « faux départ » de la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*? », *Revue germanique internationale*, 24 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.4000/rgi.1620>.
- 8 Katharina Dulckeit. "Language, Objects, and the Missing Link: Toward a Hegelian Theory of Reference". In *Hegel and Language*. Edited by Jere O'Neill Surber (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 145–164.
- 9 Cf. Martin Heidegger. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Parvis Emad and Kenneth May (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 46.
- 10 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 328.
- 11 Tinland argues that this shift alone makes Maldiney's critique illegitimate: « il en va bien ici de la mise à l'épreuve et du dévoilement de la pauvreté du savoir conçu comme « savoir immédiat » des singularités sensibles, non de la restitution de la richesse intrinsèque de l'univers sensible. Toute interrogation sur la légitimité du « départ » de la *Phénoménologie* se doit de prendre en compte cet enjeu spécifique de l'ouvrage » (Tinland, « Y a-t-il un « faux départ » de la *Phénoménologie de l'esprit*? »).
- 12 Cf. Heidegger, "Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit," p. 54. Well in line with the Husserlian and post-Husserlian phenomenology, Maldiney does not accept the hierarchy of "higher" and "lower" forms of conscious life which are present in the whole Hegelian account of the sensuous experience. He would disagree that "[t]he more comprehensive, higher nature of the spiritual ... emerge[s] ... only in conceptual thinking" (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Philosophy of Mind*. Edited by M.J. Inwood, translated by W. Wallace and A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 71 [*Encyclopaedia* §400]).
- 13 Straus as well as Maldiney understand the world as a configuration of meaning in the process of constitution and not as the objective world.
- 14 Straus, „Vom Sinn der Sinne“, S. 257.
- 15 Ibid., S. 254, also 372.
- 16 Ibid., S. 372–373.
- 17 Ibid., S. 207.
- 18 Ibid., S. 331–332.
- 19 Ibid., S. 372.
- 20 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 188, 332, 334.
- 21 Erwin Straus. "Phenomenology of memory". In *Phenomenology of Memory. The Third Lexington Conference on Pure and Applied Phenomenology*. Edited by Griffith R.M. & Straus E. (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1970), p. 60.
- 22 Straus, „Vom Sinn der Sinne“, S. 207.
- 23 Maldiney. « *Penser l'homme et la folie* », p. 148.
- 24 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 190.
- 25 Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Primacy of Perception, and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*. Edited by J. M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 17, italics added.



- 26 Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 173, cited by Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 334.
- 27 Cf. Jean Hyppolite. *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Spirit'*. Translated by Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 85.
- 28 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 356.
- 29 Cf. Tanja Staehler. *Hegel, Husserl and the Phenomenology of Historical Worlds* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016), p. 83.
- 30 Heidegger, "Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit," p. 71.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Edmund Husserl. *Logical Investigations. Vol. 1*. Translated by J.N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 217.
- 33 Husserl distinguishes between the occasional statements where deixis appears in the form of "this" and the "subjective occasional statements" containing I-You, here-there and now-then.
- 34 Husserl. "Logical Investigations," p. 218.
- 35 Maldiney would disagree with Roman Jakobson's famous claim that for Husserl shifters (that is, deictic expressions and other grammatical units which could perform deictic function) have no general meaning (Roman Jakobson. "Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb". In *Word and Language*. Selected writings vol. 2 (De Gruyter Mouton, 1971), p. 132). A similar point is expressed in Elmar Holenstein. "Jakobson and Husserl. A contribution to the genealogy of structuralism". In *The Web of Meaning: Language, Noema and Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity*. Edited by R. Bernet, D. Welton, G. Zavota (London: Routledge, 2005) p. 27).
- 36 Husserl. "Logical Investigations," p. 218.
- 37 Ibid., p. 220.
- 38 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 367.
- 39 Ibid., p. 368.
- 40 Husserl. "Logical Investigations," p. 218, cited above.
- 41 Étienne Balibar, who in a recent paper has developed an argument quite similar to that of Maldiney's (without referring to Maldiney, though), claimed that the "experience called 'sense certainty' ... derives ... from a fictive linguistic experimentation" (Étienne Balibar. *From Sense Certainty to the Law of Genre: Hegel, Benveniste, Derrida*. In *Citizen Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), p. 110.
- 42 Hyppolite, "Genesis and Structure of Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Spirit,'" p. 86.
- 43 Ibid., p. 403, italics added.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Balibar, "From Sense Certainty to the Law of Genre," p. 110. Cf. also: „In Hegels Augen ist diese Abstraktion vom eigenen Bewußtsein die höchste Garantie für die Wissenschaftlichkeit der philosophischen Darstellung der Erfahrung... Diese Abstraktion vom eigenen Bewußtsein hat indes zur Folge, daß das Problem der Intersubjektivität völlig aus dem Blickfeld Hegels verschwindet.“ László Tengelyi. *Erfahrung und Ausdruck*. Phänomenologie im Umbruch bei Husserl und seinen Nachfolgern, (Dordrecht: Springer 2007), S. 25–26).
- 46 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 356.
- 47 Maldiney ascribes permanence to concepts which seems hardly appropriate in the case of Hegel.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Émile Benveniste. "Problems in General Linguistics," p. 226, italics in original.

- 50 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 354.
- 51 Jean-Claude Milner traces Benveniste's statement "'Ego' is he who *says* 'ego'" (Benveniste, "Problems in General Linguistics", p. 224, italics in original) to Kojève's famous claim "Man becomes conscious of himself when ... he says 'I'" (Alexandre Kojève. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Edited by A. Bloom, translated by J.H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 3. However, despite the similarity of wording, Benveniste's perspective is different. For Kojève, it is self-consciousness that emerges when the subject says "I", whereas for Benveniste "I" cannot be reduced to self-consciousness or to any other form of self-apperception (Jean-Claude Milner. *Le périple structural* (Verdier, 2008), p. 130.
- 52 It is worth pointing out that for Benveniste, as opposed to Austin, the illocutive force of certain speech acts is related to the "subjectivity" of discourse expressed in deixis: "'to swear' consists exactly of the utterance *I swear*, by which Ego is bound.... The utterance is identified with the act itself. But this condition is not given in the meaning of the verb, it is the "subjectivity" of discourse which makes it possible.... This is a consequence of the fact that the instance of discourse that contains the verb establishes the act at the same time that it sets up the subject. Hence the act is performed by the instance of the utterance of its 'name' (which is 'swear') at the same time that the subject is established by the instance of the utterance of its indicator (which is 'I')." (Benveniste, "Problems in General Linguistics", pp. 229–230, italics in original).
- 53 Dastur. « Henri Maldiney lecteur de Hegel », p. 35.
- 54 Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 229.
- 55 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 359.
- 56 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 191 and Maldiney. « *Penser l'homme et la folie* », p. 150.
- 57 Edmund Husserl. *Formale und transzendente Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft*. Mit ergänzenden Texten. Hrsg. von Paul Janssen. Husserliana Bd. XVII (Springer, 1974), S. 207.
- 58 Husserl. „Formale und transzendente Logik“, S. 439–440.
- 59 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 354.
- 60 Emmanuel Housset. *L'intériorité de l'exil. Le soi au risque de d'altérité* (Paris: Cerf, 2008), p. 301.
- 61 Benveniste, "Problems in General Linguistics," p. 220.
- 62 In this connection, Maldiney employs the term "cosmogogenesis" borrowed from Paul Klee (Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 374).
- 63 Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 360.
- 64 Maldiney. « *Penser l'homme et la folie* », p. 256.
- 65 This is how Maldiney sees the Master-Slave dialectics: each figure takes up a position determined in advance like a social role; this position is not rooted in a particular situation of communication but pre-determines it. Communication as encounter does not happen or is reduced to an exchange of information. On the contrary, in a communication my interlocutor becomes my 'you' that is transcendent to my 'I': not because she accepts me for who I want to be, but because she reveals something in me that I was not aware of myself (Maldiney, « Regard, Parole, Espace », p. 384).
- 66 An aesthetic encounter plays a key role in Maldiney's philosophy of sense experience. For more details see Anna Yampolskaya. "Metamorphoses of the subject: Kandinsky interpreted by Michel Henry and Henri Maldiney". In *Avant*. 2 (2018), pp. 157–167. DOI:10.26913/avant.2018.02.10.

- 67 Maldiney would not call himself a transcendental phenomenologist; he prefers a Heideggerian ontological language which can also be seen as a variant of transcendental philosophy. For more details regarding different interpretations of transcendentalism in Husserl and post-Husserlian phenomenology see a recent work by Alexander Schnell. *Was ist Phänomenologie?* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2019), S. 83–108.
- 68 Edmund Husserl. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy*. Translated by D. Carr. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 155.
- 69 Jitendra Nath Mohanty. “Husserl’s Transcendental Phenomenology and Essentialism.” In *The Review of Metaphysics*, 32, No. 2 (1978), pp. 299–321. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/20127191](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20127191).
- 70 Edmund Husserl. *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*. Husserliana Band. III, Halbband 1. Hrsg. von Karl Schuhmann (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1976), S. 131. This sentence is absent in the 1913 edition of *Ideas I* as well as in Kersten’s translation.
- 71 Maldiney. « Penser l’homme et la folie », p. 100 and Henry Maldiney. *L’art, l’éclaire de l’être* (Paris: Cerf, 2012), pp. 124–125. Maldiney repeatedly mentions this case whilst modifying Minkowski’s wording (Cf. Eugène Minkowski. *La schizophrénie: psychopathologie des schizoïdes et de schizophrènes* (Payot, 2002), p. 116).
- 72 Well in line with this analysis of psychosis Jakobson indicates that the “Scardanelli poems as well as Hölderlin’s other later poems lack the grammatical class of ‘shifters,’ ... The absence of this basic category is especially striking in comparison with the poet’s earlier dialogue-oriented works, where it was efficiently prominent”. Roman Jakobson. *Verbal art, verbal sign, verbal time* (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 138–139.
- 73 Hegel, “The Phenomenology of Spirit,” p. 60.
- 74 Hegel. “Philosophy of Mind”, p. 70 [*Encyclopaedia* §400].
- 75 Support from the Basic Research Program of the National Research University Higher School of Economics for 2021 is gratefully acknowledged.

### 3 Truth and (its) Appearance in Hegel's *Phenomenology*

Brandom, Pippin and Houlgate on *Geist*  
and Consciousness

*Sebastian Stein*

To God everything is beautiful, good, and just; humans, however, think  
some things are unjust and others just.

—Heraclitus

#### 3.1 Introduction

The two most prominent notions in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* that ground the work's categorial deductions are consciousness and spirit<sup>1</sup> (or 'mind', from here on, *Geist*<sup>2</sup>). These may be considered 'fundamental' in the sense that their relationship provides the foundation for all the higher-order claims that Hegel makes about cognition, action, ethical life, faith, morality, religion, art and philosophy. At the same time, the *Phenomenology*'s overarching argument suggests that consciousness is in some way grounded in or is even an aspect of *Geist*. This raises the question of ontological priority: Is *Geist* just another name for what ontologically prioritized, consciousness-equipped beings think and do, or are finite, consciousness-equipped beings the appearance of ontologically prioritized *Geist*? The answer to this question seems crucial insofar as justifying philosophy's claims with reference to the thoughts of finite thinkers seems to enable a challenge to the claims' status that justifying philosophy's claims with reference to a universal and self-referential principle such as *Geist* does not:<sup>3</sup> if philosophy's claims are made by finite, consciousness-equipped thinkers, the claims could be otherwise because by definition, a finite thinker's thought could be true or untrue.<sup>4</sup> It might thus just be a contingent opinion. In contrast, if the subject of philosophy is universal *Geist* itself, philosophy's claims are necessarily true since they represent 'the universal truth (*Geist*) that thinks the universal truth (*Geist*)', thereby conceptually eliminating the possibility of error.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, it is argued that three of the most prominent and influential interpreters of Hegel's thought, Robert Brandom, Robert Pippin

and Stephen Houlgate, read the relationship between consciousness and *Geist* in the *Phenomenology* differently and that each of their readings entails conceptual challenges that might ultimately not be resolvable without overstepping the boundaries set by Hegel's work itself. In the following, an introduction to the idealist origins of Hegel's notions of consciousness and *Geist* prepares the chapter's investigation into the takes of Hegel's interpreters.

### 3.2 The Origins of the *Phenomenology's* Account of Consciousness and *Geist*

The roots of the *Phenomenology's* description of the relationship between consciousness and *Geist* can be traced back to the (post-)Kantian idealist discussion about the relationship between finite subjects' consciousness and unconditioned truth. Echoing David Hume's empiricism, Immanuel Kant thus rejects rationalism's claim that finite, consciousness-equipped thinkers have direct intellectual access to unconditioned truth (e.g. substance, nature, God, monads, divine harmony, etc.).<sup>6</sup> Kant defines the realm of consciousness-equipped subjects and their theoretical and practical relationships to objectivity as 'phenomenal' and contrasts it with the 'noumenal' realm that is beyond contentful knowledge.<sup>7</sup> The noumenal realm's utterly unconditioned truth can at best be negatively explained in contrast to consciousness's subjectivity and the phenomenal realm of time, space, nature and causation.<sup>8</sup> Kant's finite, consciousness-equipped thinkers thus know that they do not know unconditioned truth as it is. However, they know that such truth is possible and that it stands in some kind of (non-causal) relationship to their own phenomenal realm.<sup>9</sup>

While the noumenal realm ensures the subjectivity-independent objectivity of phenomenal objectivity, its indeterminacy also enables the autonomous spontaneity of the cognizing and acting phenomenal subject that otherwise would be as causally determined as the rest of phenomenal nature. Insofar as the relationship between noumenal truth and phenomenal subject is not causal, the subject may thus be autonomous in virtue of its relationship to the noumenal. To Kant, both phenomenal subject and object are thus what they are in virtue of their participation in the noumenal. The conceptual dimensions of (1) phenomenal subjectivity and objectivity and (2) the noumenal in its function as a guarantor of subjective spontaneity and autonomy and of the partial independence of phenomenal objectivity thus negate and thereby mediate and determine each other.

### 3.3 Fichte on Appearance: I and Non-I

Johann Gottlieb Fichte applauds Kant's prioritizing focus on phenomenal, yet spontaneous subjectivity and his simultaneous insistence on objectivity's

irreducibility: on Fichte's reading, Kant's phenomenal objectivity cannot be entirely explained with reference to phenomenal subjectivity because the noumenal realm grounds the possibility of phenomenal objectivity's independence from subjectivity.

However, Fichte also rejects the notion of an entirely subjectivity-independent noumenal 'thing in itself' as dogmatic:<sup>10</sup> since the noumenon cannot be explained with reference to consciousness's subjectivity, Fichte thinks of it as 'assumed' rather than mediated or deduced. To Fichte, Kant's central insight thus consists in arguing that any kind of objectivity (what Fichte calls 'Non-I') has to be explicable with reference to subjectivity ('the I') *while* objectivity has to be irreducible to subjectivity since subjectivity conceptually requires objectivity to be what it is.

To avoid the radical non-subjectivity of Kant's noumenal 'thing in itself' while at the same time ensuring the irreducibility of objectivity, Fichte argues that the I posits itself and then freely<sup>11</sup> posits its own, irreducible negation in the form of the 'Non-I':<sup>12</sup> according to Fichte's definition of the I's freedom, the I could also not posit itself as the Non-I but must posit itself in this way to be able to be what it is in the first place.

Since Fichte's Non-I can be explained with reference to the I, it is not dogmatic like Kant's noumenal 'thing in itself'. At the same time, since the Non-I is defined as inevitably connected to and irreducibly distinct from the I, the Non-I's objectivity does not disappear in the I's subjectivity. The I and Non-I thus mutually mediate: the I is the 'non-Non-I', and the Non-I is the negation of the I in which everything originates.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.4 Fichte's God as Unconditioned Truth

Fichte thus rejects Kant's strict dichotomy between the unknowable, unconditioned noumenal world of the thing in itself and the subjectivity-dominated phenomenal world of appearance. And yet, Fichte holds on to Kant's notion that consciousness and its world are the appearances of what Fichte calls the unknowable 'God'.<sup>14</sup>

Fichte argues that if God could be known, it would be the perfect harmony of all subjectivity and objectivity, flawless and serene self-adequacy and thus self-referential infinity. However, 'we' as finite, consciousness-equipped beings and our subjectivity are confined to the world of God's appearance that is characterized by striving and longing for objective knowledge and moral and ethical perfection. This striving has its roots in the irreducible difference between our I-based, subjective consciousness and the Non-I-based objectivity that the I simultaneously posits and confronts as irreducible.<sup>15</sup>

So although Fichte argues that God and the world of consciousness-possessing individuals are not as strictly separated as Kant suggests when he places god in the noumenal sphere, god and us still differ because God is located outside of the realm of consciousness's knowledge: 'we',

as finite individuals, and the empirical world that we confront, cognize and interact with, constitute the appearance of God and not how God truly is.<sup>16</sup> Any knowledge that we have of God is of how god appears (to us) rather than how God truly is so that our knowledge of God is not actual knowledge. We are thus identical with God insofar as we are *its* appearance, and yet we differ from God as we are only how God *appears*. Fichte's God as the ultimate and eternal principle of all reality thus remains beyond us and our world of as appearance and thus beyond our consciousness, empirical cognition and philosophical insight.<sup>17</sup>

So while both Kant and Fichte argue for at least the irreducible possibility of unconditioned truth (the noumenal/God) and imply some kind of identity-based relationship between it and 'our' consciousness and its world, a unity with or philosophical knowledge of such truth is prevented by their emphasis on the prioritized difference between finite consciousness and infinite truth.

### 3.5 Hegel on Finite Consciousness and Unconditioned Truth

Reacting to his predecessors in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel worries that Kant and Fichte find themselves unable to explain the identity between consciousness and truth that the two must share if consciousness and its philosophical claims are to qualify as truth-adequate.

According to Hegel, the difference between consciousness and truth that Kant and Fichte posit as fundamental and that serves as their vantage point onto truth sabotages the notion that consciousness – and thus also they as consciousness-equipped thinkers – can have knowledge of the truth. It undermines the notion of philosophical knowledge altogether: since Kant's noumenon and Fichte's God as descriptions of unconditioned truth fundamentally differ from consciousness-based thought, the finite, consciousness-equipped philosopher does not know truth *as it is*. At best, empirical knowledge and philosophy then describe how truth *appears* and how it appears to be categorially structured, implying that truth could be otherwise from its appearance (PS §38). The finite subject is thus limited to analyzing what appears to be true and which therefore might be false.

Crucially, this entails that the philosophical truth-claim that consciousness cannot know unconditioned truth becomes itself problematic. The unconditioned, philosophical truth that consciousness cannot know truth cannot be known by consciousness. This undermines the status of philosophy as a science that communicates knowledge of truth and instead defines philosophy as an endless striving for truth that never succeeds in actually capturing it.

Echoing Fichte whilst going beyond him, Hegel accordingly argues in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that philosophy should not be understood as a striving for or a love of knowledge and truth (PS §5). Instead, it must be conceived as an articulation of knowledge and truth.

### 3.6 The Method of Hegel's *Phenomenology*

Despite this difficulty that Hegel associates with grounding philosophical thought in consciousness, at first sight, his argument in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* seems to share his predecessors' fundamental commitment to 'consciousness' (PS §2). The *Phenomenology* thus begins with an analysis of consciousness as the appearance (PS §5)<sup>18</sup> of *Geist*, and this analysis is itself undertaken by consciousness. Like Kant's and Fichte's discussions of cognition and moral and ethical action, so Hegel's *Phenomenology* thus assumes finite, subjective consciousness and its relationship to objectivity: the world's objectivity is always already related to consciousness's finite subjectivity so that consciousness may cognize and interact with the world because the two are always already in an identity-based context:

The standpoint of consciousness consists in knowing of objective things in opposition to itself, and in knowing of itself in opposition to them.... As long as science lacks such actuality, it is only the content as the *in-itself*, the *purpose* that is still only an *interior*, not yet spirit, only spiritual substance. This *in-itself* has to come out into the open and become *for itself*, and this simply means that this in-itself has to posit self-consciousness as one with itself.

(PS §26)

However, Hegel also wants to guarantee the unity of consciousness as truth's appearance on the one hand and of truth on the other. This ought to fundamentally ensure the compatibility of consciousness, the world, other consciousnesses and the veracity of philosophy. Hegel thus argues that truth and consciousness are first united instead of being differentiated, with truth taking conceptual precedence over its appearance: consciousness can only be known to be the appearance of truth because truth always already exists as consciousness and is known by consciousness as such. At the same time, however, Hegel insists that consciousness and its finitude must not get conceptually lost in truth's universal infinity: if consciousness is reduced to being a subordinated aspect of an ultimately prioritized, purely universal truth, this would deprive truth of its means of contrast, making it impossible to conceptually determine truth (leading back into Kant's noumenon and Fichte's unknowable god). Hegel thus argues that actual truth consists of the speculative unity of finite consciousness' particularity and of unconditioned truth's universality: actual truth unites consciousness's particular finitude and abstract truth's universal infinity to define 'true truth' as both at once. It is finite and infinite, truly infinite and finite in being infinite (PS §29). This participation in 'true truth' enables the finite, consciousness-possessing thinkers to know the truth as it is and to philosophically describe it.



It is thus in virtue of the underlying identity of consciousness and truth that truth's ultimate form is accessible to Hegel's consciousness-equipped thinkers and that philosophical thought is true. At the same time, the difference between consciousness and truth ensures consciousness's independence from an overarching or prioritized universality (PS §30). Seeking to distance himself from his predecessors, Hegel refrains from labeling his notion of 'true truth', that is the unity of consciousness and truth, as 'the noumenon' or 'God'. Instead, he baptizes it '*Geist*' (PS §7). So while consciousness is the condition of the possibility of objectivity without thereby undermining objectivity's relative independence, *Geist* is described as the immanent, ontological condition of the possibility of consciousness and its objectivity. Crucially, the fundamental unity of *Geist* and consciousness should entail that *Geist* in all its categorial forms is accessible to consciousness and thus to philosophy because consciousness *is Geist*, only in the form of appearance.<sup>19</sup> *Geist* thus posits itself as consciousness and its world in such a way that consciousness and its world are irreducibly differentiated aspects within *Geist*.

Universal, unconditioned truth constitutes thus one dimension of *Geist* while the finitude of consciousness and world is the other. Within *Geist*, the two are differentiated *in* being the same (PS §25). Their identity is thus supposed to accommodate their difference without dissolving this difference in favor of either moment's priority so that both moments are kept in a mutually mediating equilibrium. This unification of consciousness' and world's finitude and truth's infinity within *Geist* entails a property transfer from each onto the respective other: in *Geist*, finite consciousness is to be as unconditioned as infinite truth. Meanwhile, infinite and unconditioned truth is as particular and finite as consciousness and its world of appearance. Consciousness and its world thus *are* the unconditioned *Geist* in finite form while at the same time, *Geist's* unconditioned truth *is* consciousness and its world. This makes *Geist* the 'truly infinite', speculative unity and 'truth' of appearance and unconditioned truth: *Geist's* true infinity is supposed to be finite and infinite at once. It posits consciousness in such a way that consciousness is as unconditioned as truth's universality while unconditioned truth is as concrete as consciousness and its world (PS §7).

Given these speculative descriptions of *Geist* and consciousness, one of the main challenges for interpreters of the *Phenomenology* thus becomes how to define and instrumentalize *Geist's* internally differentiated unity of particular consciousness and universal truth that frames the entire *Phenomenology* and how to gauge the consequences this structure has for the status of its philosophical claims.

### 3.7 Chapter Outlook

Three of the most influential interpreters that substantially helped to rehabilitate Hegel in Anglophone circles took on this challenge and each

of them champions a unique take on the relationship of these two central notions and on the work's method. These are Robert Brandom, Robert Pippin and Stephen Houlgate. The following sections discuss their readings of the *Phenomenology* in conceptual sequence: First, Brandom's take on consciousness and *Geist* is contrasted with Pippin's approach. This shows that Pippin suggests that Brandom's pragmatist interpretation of *Geist* as socially and historically situated (self-)consciousness is potentially self-undermining because it remains at least neutral regarding the possibility of universally valid, philosophical knowledge, which, in turn, might sabotage the standing of Brandom's own philosophical propositions.

However, Pippin's own universality-guaranteeing, transcendental interpretation can be taken to run into difficulties when it defines *Geist* as a metaphor for consciousness. To Pippin's Hegel, the philosophical knowledge claims of the *Phenomenology* represent knowledge held by finite, consciousness-equipped thinkers. However, such knowledge is part of appearance, which, by definition, could be otherwise than the truth. It might thus be that Pippin's commitment to consciousness over *Geist* renders philosophical knowledge contingent and thus stands in seeming contradiction to Hegel's ambition to report on the scientific-philosophical knowledge of truth as it actually is.

Potentially avoiding this problem, Houlgate offers a strictly universalist reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* that implies that its claims represent knowledge that universal being/thought (in its form as *Geist*) has about itself: philosophy means that conscious agents who are part of being/thought know being/thought.<sup>20</sup> The *Phenomenology*'s philosophical knowledge might thus be defined as universally valid knowledge held by universal being/thought about universal being/thought.

However, this seems to contradict Hegel's claim that the *Phenomenology* describes how truth is "for consciousness" rather than how it is in and for itself. Focusing on this issue, the chapter's final part will take a short glance at Hegel's discussion of the *Phenomenology*'s method and argue that while the *Phenomenology* and its knowledge claims show how truth (*Geist*) is for consciousness, it does not yet show how truth is for truth (i.e. how *Geist* is for *Geist*). To Hegel, the *Phenomenology*'s subject of knowing remains individual consciousness with the consequence that its knowledge is fallible: at best, the *Phenomenology* thus shows how *Geist* (including philosophy) is known by conscious thinkers, which entails the possibility of error due to consciousness's status as *Geist*'s finite appearance. Furthermore, given the lack of an argument about how the *Phenomenology*'s point of view of consciousness can be overcome and how the encyclopedic system's position of absolute *Geist* as the subject of philosophical knowledge can be assumed, the pedagogical value of the *Phenomenology* remains questionable. Still, Hegel's transfer of a substantial amount of the *Phenomenology*'s categorial

claims into his later encyclopedic system lends credibility to the notion that the *Phenomenology* already contains much of what the later Hegel took to be unconditionally true about *Geist*.

### 3.8 Main Argument

#### 3.8.1 Robert Brandom on Consciousness

In his book *A Spirit of Trust*, Robert Brandom provides more detail on his decades-spanning ‘rational reconstruction’<sup>21</sup> of the *Phenomenology* and Hegel’s thought in general. To Brandom, Hegel’s work is centered on the notion of consciousness and provides an analysis of how conscious cognition and rational praxis is meta-conceptually structured.<sup>22</sup> Brandom’s metaconcepts thus represent philosophical rather than empirical knowledge and do so always in relation to (self-)consciousness.<sup>23</sup> And yet, Brandom knowingly inverts the justificatory and thus conceptual order of Hegel’s project with regards to the relationship between categorial metaconcepts and ordinary concepts: while he reads Hegel as evaluating regular concepts in the light of how they are formed by metaconcepts, Brandom considers metaconcepts useful only insofar as they are shown to relate to ordinary concepts.<sup>24</sup> According to Brandom, Hegel’s metaconceptual-categorial account of cognition thus provides an ‘ordinary concept’-relative and thus potentially not transcendently necessary meta-framework of how finite, conscious subjects acquire regular conceptual content that defines things by their negative relation to other things.<sup>25</sup>

Emphasizing the irreducibility of the objectivity of cognized conceptual content, Brandom stresses that the intelligibility of content does not owe anything to consciousness-equipped subjects and, crucially, “let alone anything to the thinking activity of any supersubject called ‘*Geist*’”.<sup>26</sup> Not only can objectivity *not* be explained away with reference to finite consciousness, but finite consciousness also cannot be explained away with reference to *Geist*.<sup>27</sup> The same focus on the priority of finite consciousness applies to his analysis of rational action: Brandom argues that finite, “discursive subjects”<sup>28</sup> practically undertake and bestow normative commitments,<sup>29</sup> recognize each other and collectively recollect.<sup>30</sup> By making certain practices their “second nature”<sup>31</sup> and institutionalizing them, the subjects articulate society-implicit norms to an ever-greater degree in the course of history.<sup>32</sup>

What role does this leave for the concept of *Geist*? To Brandom, *Geist* refers to what individual subjects collectively and historically decide to institutionalize. *Geist* thus consists in subjects’ activity in a given social and historical context<sup>33</sup> so that *Geist* is entirely explicable in terms of consciousness: at  $t_1$ , *Geist* may differ from *Geist* at  $t_2$  if consciousness-equipped subjects collectively institutionalize different

norms at  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ . In this sense, the content of *Geist* is contingent rather than necessary.<sup>34</sup>

However, Brandom also assigns a continuity-ensuring, historical dimension to *Geist* when he argues that recollective social processes of norm-creation and -application by finite subjects are “expressively progressive”<sup>35</sup> and constitute a “gradual, cumulative revelation”<sup>36</sup> of *Geist*'s norms that have been implicit all along: over time, collectives of finite subjects ever better understand *Geist*'s norms that implicitly govern their actions and realize them to an ever more concrete degree.<sup>37</sup>

Crucially, this does not make a case for the actual unconditionality of *Geist*'s norms: *Geist*'s norms are what happens to have been discovered and instituted over time in a particular context. Both normative ‘progress’ and authority are thus relative to particular, culturally informed social contexts and the particular norms that inform these contexts. This entails that what is judged to be progress today may be defined as regress tomorrow if there is a fundamental change in the manner in which norms are discovered and enacted in a particular context. Given certain empirical developments, it might thus turn out that what has been taken to be the most profound implicit norm of a society, or set of norms, was not. In principle, any judgment about normative ‘progress’ is thus qualified by ‘as far as one can tell’ as any judgment about progress might turn out to be an error or truly a judgment about regress.<sup>38</sup>

The question of whether norms are unconditionally true, necessary and enjoy universal validity seems to have no place within Brandom's framework: asking whether a given society's *Geist*'s norms are valid independently from the time and place of their creation and discovery is to misunderstand how socio-historical norm-creation and -discovery pragmatically works.

### 3.9 A Pragmatic Take on Pragmatism

Brandom further emphasizes that the same applies to philosophy's metaconcepts:

[T]here are concepts that play the distinctive expressive role of articulating features of the framework that makes description and explanation possible. These “pure concepts of the Understanding” are the ancestors of Hegel's “speculative,” logical, or philosophical concepts. Like Kant's categories, these are metaconcepts: concepts whose job it is to express key features of the use and content of the ground-level empirical and practical concepts Hegel calls “determinate” concepts.<sup>39</sup>

Also philosophy thus pragmatically posits and discovers its norms so that Brandom “retrospectively recollects”<sup>40</sup> the *Phenomenology*, leading to the same context-dependence of philosophical knowledge that also

defines regular concepts and norms. As a philosopher, Brandom thinks of himself as reporting on what Hegel reports about what counts as the conceptual content of metaconcepts in a particular socio-historical context.

Assuming Brandom's pragmatism and that he is largely concerned with the same metaconcepts and thus philosophical norms as Hegel, the philosophical success of Brandom's reading of the *Phenomenology* would then depend on Brandom's ability to identify the relevant norms and metaconcepts in Hegel's work and that Hegel's account was indeed tracking what is most profoundly important given his time and place. In so doing, Brandom's own judgment about Hegel and the relevant norm-context would be conditioned by Brandom's context, considering that Hegel might have been mistaken about the true norms and metaconcepts that define thought and that Brandom's context might reveal the norms that he and potentially Hegel thought to be worthwhile were only temporarily and locally relevant phenomena.

Like Hegel's writing of the *Phenomenology*, so, too, Brandom's interpretation of it would be a contextualized analysis of consciousness and *Geist* that depends on socially implicit norms and the practices of social and historical, consciousness-equipped individuals and their definition and application of conceptual content and norms.<sup>41</sup> As Robert Pippin points out, Brandom's particular relativity of concepts, metaconcepts and norms of cognition and action applies to the very notion of philosophy itself:

[The authority of basic roles and functions] stems from the developmental justification Hegel has provided for his distinct account of the nature and authority of freedom ('the worthiest and most sacred possession of man'). This is all parallel to the way in which Brandom's own account of conceptual content is itself a normative claim, a claim that the matter ought to be rendered explicit in this way, as a matter of inferential articulation, instituted social statuses and so forth, and not itself the carrying-forward of a tradition (one among many other philosophical traditions), itself subject later to the 'authority of the future'. It (Brandom's account) presumably has its own authority, assuming that it is meant as itself a philosophical claim, not just the interpretation and application of other claims.<sup>42</sup>

As an American pragmatist in the late 20th/early 21st century, for whom pragmatism is the implicit philosophical norm about how to discuss metaconcepts and interpret past thinkers, Brandom might just be following his context's implicit commitment. Given that all concepts and norms depend on a particular context, also Brandom's claims about pragmatism are conditioned as there is no methodological reason to associate unconditional validity with Brandom's pragmatist method of interpretation or thought.

And yet, this seems to contradict Brandom's implicit commitment to the unconditionality of his own method. If he did not think of his method as unconditionally valid, the seemingly context-independent pragmatist notion that philosophy is context-dependent would itself depend on context. This seems to entail the following contradiction:

1. According to pragmatism, all thought is context-dependent.
2. Premise (1) is not context-dependent.

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(Conclusion) Premise (1) is and is not context-dependent.

To avoid this self-contradiction, Brandom would have to commit to the notion that his pragmatism is unconditionally and thus context-independently true. Barring an argument as to how pragmatism as a philosophical method can avoid the relativity that follows from its own definition of pragmatist thought, Brandom seems vulnerable to skeptical doubts about pragmatism's ability to establish its own unconditional validity.

### 3.10 Robert Pippin on Consciousness and *Geist*

By pointing out that Brandom himself is committed to some notion of the unconditional validity of pragmatism, Pippin lends force to his own questioning of the seemingly relativistic consequences of Brandom's reading of Hegel.

Pippin thus stresses what he takes to be Hegel's own commitment to the universal and thus unconditional validity of his philosophical claims, arguing that the *Phenomenology's* categorial deductions and *Geist's* norms aim to constitute substantive and thus in some concrete sense universally valid, philosophical knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

On Pippin's reading, *Geist* thus describes those universally valid, freedom-embodiment socio-political norms that consciousness has created and discovered through historical trial-and-error-style progress: Hegel's account of *Geist* reports on the universally valid, historical lessons humanity has learned about how to institutionalize individual and socio-political freedom in its striving for an ever-freer social order.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.11 Pippin on Hegel's Universality of Freedom

Pippin accordingly criticizes Brandom for failing to provide an account about how such unconditioned universality can be possible. If norms exclusively depended on the particular and contingent practices that Brandom describes, their universality would not be established as actual.<sup>45</sup> On Pippin's reading, Brandom's social knowledge claims and conventions are thus as contingent as any of the thoughts that finite subjects have and the actions that they undertake for social and historical reasons.<sup>46</sup>

This also affects Brandom's notion of normative change, according to which new norms come into being in common-law style negotiations in the light of already existing practices:<sup>47</sup> both the old and the new norms are defined as primarily *particular* and thus as potentially relative and conditioned.

In contrast, Pippin argues that Hegel thinks of norms as part of a developmental account of the *universal* value of freedom that lays claim to unconditioned, reason-based authority. Pippin's consciousness-possessing agents discover through often severe and profound community-internal conflicts what freedom universally means and which kind of institutions and norms enable truly free lives.<sup>48</sup>

Pippin's Hegel thus unconditionally knows that freedom is the universal value of history and what its institutional form looks like. Insofar as Hegel's arguments in the *Phenomenology* do express universal philosophical truth, he does have access to a non-relative standard by which to judge any socio-historical arrangement: particular sociopolitical configurations can be compared regarding the degree to which they meet the universal standard.

This more agonistic, universalist reading enables Pippin to avoid the charges leveled against Brandom that Hegel's metaconceptual-philosophical claims are merely particular and could be otherwise as they merely describe what happens to conceptually work at a given time and place and that the method of pragmatism cannot justify its implicit claim to unconditional validity.

Pippin's reading also seems to enable an explanation about how Hegel came to think of himself as possessing universally valid knowledge about consciousness and *Geist*: by identifying *Geist* with the conditions of the possibility of consciousness-based cognition and recognition, and laying claim to describing *Geist*'s knowledge about itself in the *Phenomenology*'s section on 'absolute knowing', Hegel is able to maintain that the claims he makes about universal truth are in line with truth itself rather than that they rely on conditioned practices and conventions that may change over time.

And yet, in agreement with Brandom,<sup>49</sup> Pippin reads *Geist* as a function of consciousness: *Geist* is not a super- or meta-subject that manifests as individual consciousness-equipped subjects. Instead, it describes the norms that a collective of conscious subjects socially and historically embraces.<sup>50</sup> Pippin thus remains adamant throughout that Hegel's talk of *Geist* is but a shorthand for referring to a collective of finite actors:

Hegel is trying to introduce into a distinct kind of historical explanation an account of the way normative notions can begin to lose their grip, are experienced with weakening authority, and that explanation counts crises like incompatible commitments or tragic dilemmas as arising from within the community's own experiences.<sup>51</sup>

Also to Pippin, *Geist* is but a name for what a community of finite subjects thinks, ascribes, practices, gives authority, recognizes and so on.<sup>52</sup> And while he thinks of *Geist*'s objective institutions and norms as universal conditions of the possibility of an ever-greater realization of finite subjects' freedom, *Geist* is primarily explicable in terms of such subjects.<sup>53</sup>

It might be that Pippin rejects the notion of *Geist* as a kind of meta-subject because he thinks that this could only be valid at the expense of the autonomy of finite subjects: either *Geist* is the self-determining subject or the finite subjects are. To safeguard the latter's freedom against their determination by *Geist* as a meta-subjective principle, *Geist* has to remain a 'metaphor'.<sup>54</sup>

### 3.12 Consciousness's Finitude and Contingency

However, this prioritization of consciousness' finite subjects over universal *Geist* seems to cause the following problem. As long as *Geist*, its norms and philosophical claims are explained in terms of the thoughts and actions of finite subjects, *Geist*'s content is contingent: by definition, knowledge held and norms instituted by finite, consciousness-equipped subjects could be otherwise since there is nothing in the notion of a finite subject's commitment to a subject-external, conceptual or normative content that entails that the subject *must* commit to this content: by definition, finite subjects could think and do otherwise.

This contingency-entailing feature of the reliance on finite subjectivity as a ground for knowledge and normativity can be shown to motivate Hegel's critique of contract theory: since contracts depend on finite subjects instating and adhering to them, they could as well not exist or be discontinued. Since finite subjects could think and act otherwise, their volition is contingent so that the contract's conceptual dependence on the finitude and thus particularity of the subjects undermines its necessity.<sup>55</sup> The same applies to norms and philosophical knowledge: when particular subjects adhere to certain norms or know something, they could also not accept the norms or not know. The norms that depend on particular subjects might thus as well not be or not be adhered to.

### 3.13 Hegel on Particulars and Universality: The Concept

The later Hegel's answer to this problem comes in the form of his account of reasonable thought and being in terms of 'the concept'.<sup>56</sup> It argues that particularity and universality are united within the concept's individuality in such a manner that neither particularity or universality is prioritized, but both of their properties are maintained and transferred onto individuality.<sup>57</sup> Since the concept also structures *Geist*,<sup>58</sup> this entails that *Geist*'s individuality is defined by the unity of universality and particularity:



*Geist* is universal, which makes it a singular principle that differs from the finite subjects' particularity. *Geist's* universality does not stand in a dependence-inducing relationship to the particular agents. At the same time, it is not unrelated to them: its concept-based unity with the subjects' particularity implies that it is them *while* they are it. Since they cannot depend on something that is them, they remain independent despite their particularity's difference to *Geist's* universality. Since they are *Geist's* particularity and *Geist* is also universal, so are they while *Geist's* universality is particular thanks to them.

Within the unity that is *Geist's* individuality, the finite, independent subjects' particularity is thus as irreducible as *Geist's* universality, which, in turn, guarantees the universality-based, normative authority of its descriptions and norms. Stating that the one universal *Geist* defines norms as valid is thus equivalent to the notion that a collective of particular, conscious subjects realizes certain norms. They are the normativity-grounding universality, and it is them so that in knowing it, they know themselves while it knows itself in knowing them.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.14 Pippin on *Geist* and Universality

Pippin further argues that the institutions and norms that Hegel identifies with *Geist* function as a universally valid condition of the possibility of the freedom of finite subjects. This can be taken to suggest that norms and institutions do not unilaterally depend on consciousness but that consciousness also always depends on them.

However, if the universal institutions were ontologically first, the finite subjects would depend on them, and the subjects' autonomy would be compromised as subjects would do what the presupposed institutions determine. Finite subjects would be following external demands rather than being self-determining. By contrast, if institutions depended on finite subjects, the institutions could be otherwise: institutions would be what particular subjects choose, and since subjects can choose otherwise, the institutions could be otherwise.<sup>60</sup>

Pippin's reading seems to suggest that the benefits of both options can be combined given that the manner in which the subjects' freedom is conditioned by institutions does not undermine their freedom. To achieve this, the subjects' finitude and the institutions' universality would have to be united within the individuality of *Geist* in such a manner that both moments' properties are preserved, thus defining *Geist* as an individual principle that consists of the universal dimension of institutions as well as of the plurality of consciousness's autonomous and particular agents.

### 3.15 *Geist*: Individuality and Appearance

However, Hegel suggests that if one contradicts the simultaneity of universality and particularity within *Geist's* individuality by prioritizing

the conscious subjects' particularity over the universality of *Geist*, one describes *Geist* in its mode of appearance: the one universal *Geist* appears as a collective of finite, consciousness-equipped subjects (PS §77). The subjects would constitute the outer dimension of *Geist* while its universality would be their inner, moving 'ground'. So while appearance prioritizes particularity over universality, it still acknowledges universality's reality as a hidden ground of appearance<sup>61</sup> but without granting equal status to the prioritized particularity. Similar to Kant's noumenon, from the perspective of the appearing, consciousness-equipped subjects, *Geist*'s universality is possible but not actual. Consistent with his critique of Kant, Hegel argues that grounding one's notion of *Geist* on the logic of consciousness-prioritizing appearance and thus committing to the priority of particular subjects over *Geist*'s universality as their ground entails that *Geist*'s universality is deprived of the actuality that is defined through the particular subjects: if particular subjects are ontologically first, the ground's universality is just possible, non-particular, non-actual and could be otherwise.

To preserve the actuality of both *Geist*'s universality and particularity, Hegel has to ground his arguments about norms and philosophical knowledge in the individuality and thus in the simultaneity of universality and subjects' particularity within *Geist*. In that case, both moments are actual and neither is privileged over the other. Crucially, Hegel argues that defining *Geist* as individual does not undermine the status and freedom of the particular subjects because they assume universality's property of unconditioned self-determination within individuality's unity while universality assumes particularity's property of determinacy and concreteness. This also affects the status of philosophical knowledge: if norms are what particular subjects think and know, they could be otherwise. If norms are what universal *Geist* knows, they are known to be universal.

However, as long as particular subjects are defined as the foundation of *Geist* and *Geist* is a metaphor for what an appearance-style collective of particular, consciousness-equipped subjects think and do, the universality and necessity of the norms and philosophical categories that Hegel lays claim to according to Pippin might have to remain out of reach. While Pippin's Hegel might aspire to give an analysis of universally valid norms and of philosophically necessary<sup>62</sup> knowledge about them, he would think of himself as being unable to prove this as long as consciousness-possessing particular subjects are the foundation of his argument.

### 3.16 Houlgate on Consciousness and *Geist*

Stephen Houlgate's reading of the *Phenomenology* can be interpreted as a reaction to some of the complications entailed by Pippin's and Brandom's prioritization of particular consciousness over *Geist*'s universality.

Houlgate thus agrees with Pippin that Hegel's philosophical claims in the *Phenomenology* about consciousness are supposed to be universally valid as they describe consciousness as such.<sup>63</sup> Like Pippin, Houlgate thus rejects Brandom's 'de re'-interpretation<sup>64</sup> – and possible modification – of Hegel's account.

This enables Houlgate to avoid the kind of self-undermining that Pippin mentions in his critique of Brandom: insofar as Hegel's claims constitute unconditioned knowledge about normative conceptual content and philosophical method, the knowledge that they are unconditioned knowledge should itself be unconditioned and thus immune to skeptical challenge. Houlgate's Hegel thus commits to the unconditionality of philosophical knowledge, which methodologically grounds his statements about freedom as an end of history and his evaluations of given societies' normative commitments.

### 3.17 Houlgate on *Geist* and Consciousness

Relating to this, Houlgate seems to part ways with Pippin (and Brandom) regarding the notion of *Geist*: while Pippin thinks of *Geist* as a metaphor for referring to the deeds and thoughts of finite subjects, Houlgate takes consciousness and *Geist* to be forms of "being/thought"<sup>65</sup> as such. While Brandom and Pippin argue for a priority of consciousness over *Geist*, Houlgate appears to defend a certain ontological priority of *Geist* (spirit) over consciousness:

As consciousness turns into this community, Hegel's phenomenology finally becomes the phenomenology of *spirit*.... Yet they are no longer shapes of consciousness in the narrow sense (or of self-consciousness or reason), but 'shapes of a world' (§441/290). All previous shapes are in turn now to be understood as *moments* of spirit, with no independent existence of their own.<sup>66</sup>

To Houlgate, Hegel's claims about consciousness are thus claims about *Geist*, only without considering consciousness's relationship to the social world, God, beauty and philosophical truth. To Houlgate, consciousness is thus still *Geist*, albeit an abstract, socially and historically decontextualized version of it.

This has consequences for the notion of philosophical method that Houlgate attributes to Hegel: on Houlgate's reading, Hegel's claims in the *Phenomenology* about consciousness and *Geist* are true insofar as they live up to Hegel's aspirations and constitute unconditioned, philosophical knowledge that is transparent to being/thought, and thus to its form as *Geist*. Hegel's analysis of finite consciousness and its determinations forms a part of this so that Hegel's *Geist*-based notion of philosophy as "absolute knowledge"<sup>67</sup> aspires to being unconditionally true in virtue of the unconditionality of *Geist* that it is based on.

This suggests that insofar as Hegel succeeds, he, as a finite thinker, is speaking with the voice of universal being/thought (in its form as *Geist*'s absolute knowing) and not just with the voice of particular consciousness. Hegel's successful, philosophical claims thus qualify as claims that *Geist* makes about itself via the autonomous and finite thinker Hegel. In other words, they are claims that Hegel as a consciousness-possessing, autonomous thinker correctly makes about the same *Geist* that also grounds (his) consciousness. In this case, both the subject of philosophical thought and its object are ultimately universal *Geist* albeit autonomously channeled by Hegel, the consciousness-equipped, philosophical thinker.

### 3.18 Houlgate on the *Phenomenology*'s Method

However, while Houlgate seems to enable Hegel's claim of speaking with the voice of being/thought via *Geist*'s absolute knowing, Houlgate also seems to qualify this notion by arguing that Hegel's claims about *Geist* in the *Phenomenology* are somehow based on a prior commitment to consciousness:

All further shapes of spirit [*Geist*] remain shapes of consciousness in the broad sense, insofar as they fall short of the identity of subject and object that characterizes speculative thought.<sup>68</sup>

Houlgate thus seems to suggest that the narrative of the *Phenomenology*, even in the section on *Geist*'s absolute knowing, does not properly achieve the unity of consciousness with *Geist*: throughout the *Phenomenology*, the difference between philosophically thinking consciousness and *Geist* is never properly sublated within an overarching, speculative unity that enables a notion of presuppositionless thought or a concept of *Geist* that speculatively accommodates consciousness without undermining it.

Should this reading be correct, Hegel could be said to fail his own aspirations according to which the *Phenomenology* is supposed to *articulate* philosophical-scientific knowledge (and thus unconditioned truth) rather than illustrate an affection for it: as long as the subject of philosophical knowledge is the finite philosopher of consciousness and not *Geist* itself, the truth (i.e. being/thought/*Geist*) does not know itself *as it is* but still *wants* to know itself through the minds of particular, consciousness-equipped subjects.<sup>69</sup> In this case, a finite thinker strives for knowledge of consciousness and *Geist* instead of possessing it: the assumed difference between truth (being/thought as *Geist*) and thinker undermines their knowledge-grounding identity. Throughout, the philosophical thinker of the *Phenomenology*'s truth that is described in the section on absolute knowing remains a truth-tracking,<sup>70</sup> *Geist*-describing

finite and consciousness-possessing subject that seems not to be identified with the same *Geist* that constitutes its object of philosophical investigation.

### 3.19 Hegel's Ambiguity on Consciousness and Absolute *Geist*

And yet, one might think that this is the best one could ask of a definition of 'successful philosophy': particular truth-tracking, consciousness-equipped philosophers determine themselves to think universal, conceptual truth and in this process describe *Geist* as it appears and as it is.

However, after finishing the *Phenomenology*, Hegel seems to have come to the conclusion that in order to conceptually ensure that philosophical knowledge is defined as universal, necessary and true, the notion of philosophical knowledge should imply that both the subject and the object of philosophy are equally unconditioned and universal. They should both be *Geist* so that *Geist* knows that philosophy is *Geist's* self-knowing that involves consciousness as an autonomous medium. Philosophical knowledge as *Geist's* self-knowing ought thus to be known by *Geist* and should be known to be such knowledge instead of being known by consciousness.<sup>71</sup>

In contrast, according to the *Phenomenology's* notion of philosophy as 'absolute knowing', the finitude of the knowing, consciousness-equipped subject introduces contingency into the notion of philosophical knowledge since by definition, finite subjects could also not know. If philosophical knowledge is defined as 'knowledge held by finite subjects', it could also not be, since the subjects' finitude defines the content of their 'knowledge'. As long as the 'knowing' subject is fundamentally finite rather than being universal *Geist* itself, the status of knowledge remains contingent and it could thus as well be opinion.

This is also true for the notion of absolute knowing as *Geist's* self-knowing: if the subject that knows that philosophy is *Geist's* self-knowing in and through the finite thinker is itself a finite, consciousness-equipped thinker, then absolute knowing and its knowledge claims could also not be known. If knowledge about universal *Geist's* self-knowing is knowledge held by a finite thinker, the thinker's finitude determines the content as contingent. Universal knowledge about philosophy that is had by a finite thinker might thus as well not be had and thus lack the necessity Hegel consistently associates with philosophical knowledge.

This applies to the definition of philosophy as well as to philosophy's other categorial determinations: even if philosophy is self-knowing *Geist*, as long as it and its knowledge is knowledge that is held by a finite subject, it could as well not be. This undermines philosophical knowledge's claim to universality and necessity: it is not necessarily the case that philosophy is self-knowing truth or that its determinations are necessarily

known if it is knowledge for consciousness, that is, for 'us'. It thus implies the following contradiction:

1. Philosophical knowledge is necessary knowledge.
2. It is contingent (consciousness-based) knowledge that philosophical knowledge and its determinations are necessary.
3. Premise (2) is philosophical knowledge.

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(Conclusion) Premise (2) is both necessary and contingent knowledge.

Since consciousness-possessing thinkers are defined as the appearance of *Geist* rather than as *Geist* how it truly is, the *Phenomenology* describes philosophical knowledge as *appearance*: philosophy as *Geist*'s self-knowing is known by *Geist*'s appearance as finite, consciousness-equipped subjects. On this definition, *Geist* only *apparently* knows that philosophy is *Geist*'s self-knowing. So the *Phenomenology*'s knowledge of philosophy is merely *apparent knowledge* and within the confines of the *Phenomenology*'s project, philosophy and all its categorial contents are only apparently known: it *appears* that the claims of philosophy and the definition of philosophy as the self-knowing of *Geist* are known, but they are not *actually* known to be the truth as long as all philosophical knowledge is knowledge held by a particular, consciousness-equipped thinker.

To avoid this and to enable the notion of philosophical knowledge as necessary knowledge, the post-*Phenomenology* Hegel defines philosophical knowledge as knowledge that is had by the unconditioned idea in its form of *Geist* as a universal subject of knowledge about the idea in its three forms logical idea, nature and *Geist* as the objects of knowledge. By definition, this self-knowing of the idea is known by the same *Geist* that posits itself as autonomous, particular thinkers.<sup>72</sup> In the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel thus argues that philosophy, defined as the true idea's necessary self-knowing, must itself be known by the idea (as *Geist*) to qualify as properly necessary knowledge.

Since this contradicts the *Phenomenology*'s definition of philosophy as absolute knowledge held by consciousness, it might be what motivates Hegel to argue that the *Phenomenology* is at best a "preparation" for true philosophical knowledge and thus for the kind of knowledge that is defined as knowledge had by *Geist*:

In this fashion have I tried to portray *consciousness* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Consciousness is spirit as concrete, self-aware knowledge – to be sure, a knowledge bound to externality, but the progression of this subject matter, like the development of all natural and spiritual life, rests exclusively on the nature of the *pure essentialities* that constitute the content of the logic. Consciousness,

as spirit which on the way of manifesting itself frees itself from its immediacy and external concretion, attains to the pure knowledge that takes these same pure essentialities for its subject matter as they are in and for themselves. They are pure thoughts, spirit that thinks its essence. Their self-movement is their spiritual life and is that through which science constitutes itself, and of which it is the exposition.<sup>73</sup>

### 3.20 The Subject of Knowing and the Transition From the *Phenomenology* Into the System

This picture of the *Phenomenology* as a propaedeutic for the system and the system's first part, the logic, is reiterated by Brandom,<sup>74</sup> Pippin<sup>75</sup> and Houlgate.<sup>76</sup> However, it can be challenged on the following grounds: throughout the *Phenomenology*, all the way to its final discussion of absolute knowing, it does not question its own assumption that its philosophical knowledge is had by a finite, consciousness-equipped subject and thus constitutes only apparent knowledge. This is altered neither by the transition from consciousness into *Geist* nor by the account of absolute knowing itself as both of these describe knowledge that is had by a finite subject and thus by *Geist*'s appearance. Furthermore, Hegel provides no argument in the work itself that could motivate its reader to abandon the notion of philosophy as absolute knowing and thus as 'philosophical knowledge for consciousness' in favor of a notion of 'philosophical knowledge about (universal) *Geist* that is had by (universal) *Geist*'. Nor does Hegel identify this as a problem or call on the reader to solve it. It thus seems to remain unclear how the *Phenomenology* prepares the system's point of view of absolute *Geist* that defines philosophy as the self-knowing of the idea in its form of *Geist*'s that is known to be so by (the idea as) *Geist*.

It is thus the case that the *Phenomenology* illustrates the categorial 'metaconceptual' problems that transcendental and subjective idealism encounter when they base their systems on consciousness rather than on *Geist*. However, the *Phenomenology* faces problems of its own in its consciousness-based attempts to establish that *Geist* is the truth of consciousness whilst sticking to consciousness as a subject of philosophical knowledge about *Geist* and consciousness. As it is conceived, the *Phenomenology* provides no reasons to motivate the thinker to leave behind the point of view of a finite, conscious subject of philosophical knowledge and to instead self-identify with *Geist* as such.

At the end of the *Phenomenology*, philosophy is still defined as true knowledge about *Geist*'s self-knowing that is had by a finite subject, thus leaving open the possibility of error. And while the *Phenomenology*'s deductions do allow for the thought that 'since *Geist* is the truth of

consciousness, the true subject of philosophical knowledge must be *Geist* rather than consciousness and this must be known by *Geist* rather than by consciousness', the work does not argue for or motivate this conclusion directly or explicitly. Instead, the later Hegel's methodological misgivings about the work seem to mainly be motivated by the fact that the *Phenomenology* is not able to shed the assumption that the knowing subject remains fundamentally an individual, consciousness-equipped subject.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.21 Overcoming of Presuppositions

However, instead of doing away with the notion that consciousness is the subject of philosophical knowledge, the encyclopedic system's 'small phenomenology' can also be read as educating the reader about what the right 'presuppositions' for philosophical thinking are: the reader who approaches the encyclopedic system in a linear manner does not conceptualize philosophical thought as absolute *Geist* at the beginning of the *Logic*. Initially, the philosophical thinker might still be a conscious and finite, truth-tracking subject. However, the problematic nature of this notion becomes apparent when consciousness is sublated with the transition into *Geist* and the deduction of absolute *Geist* at the 'end' of Hegel's (circular and in that sense infinite) system. There, philosophical thought and thus all the system's determinations are defined as 'the idea' that knows itself through its form of *Geist*: the subject of philosophical thought has been the idea as *Geist* all along, no matter where on the system's circle the thinker's thought is located. All philosophy is the idea's self-knowing, and it uses its form as *Geist* to achieve this.<sup>78</sup>

One could thus argue that this is the true meaning of the kind of 'presuppositionless thinking' that the *Phenomenology* is supposed to motivate: the true subject of philosophical thought is the idea as *Geist* and the finite philosopher channels *Geist*'s thinking of the idea in its three forms: *logic*, *nature* and *Geist*. Insofar as this includes *Geist*'s realization that the idea is the true subject of philosophical thought, the true standpoint of philosophical thought always is that of the idea as absolute *Geist*. This makes it an implicit assumption of all philosophy and thus also of the *Logic* that the concept-based *Geist* is always already implied to be the subject of philosophical thinking. Meanwhile, *Geist* is defined as the idea in its subjective form and knowledge of logic, nature and *Geist* is accordingly the idea that knows itself through its form as *Geist*.<sup>79</sup>

From the most abstract to the most concrete determination, the subject of philosophical knowledge is thus the idea so that all philosophical knowledge is grounded in the idea's universality rather than in consciousness's finitude. Still, given that Hegel's *Logic* begins its conceptual enquiry at a much higher degree of abstraction with its discussion of 'Being'<sup>80</sup> than the *Phenomenology* with its discussions of consciousness,



and given that Hegel integrates many of the *Phenomenology*'s conceptual insights into the system's sections on 'subjective, objective and absolute *Geist*', at least Hegel seems to have been less worried about transitioning some of the claims of the *Phenomenology* into the system than about its methodological commitment to consciousness over *Geist*.<sup>81</sup>

In any case, Hegel's later encyclopedic description of philosophy as 'absolute *Geist*' suggests that he decided to leave behind the assumption of finite consciousness also in the context of philosophy and that there was a need to deduce the *Phenomenology*'s standpoint of consciousness via the deductions he provides in the system's *Logic* and its philosophy of nature.

While this methodological issue is not explicitly discussed by Brandom, Pippin or Houlgate, Brandom and Pippin at least indirectly take a stance regarding it via their commitment to consciousness over *Geist*. Meanwhile, Stephen Houlgate places it at the center of his interpretation when he problematizes the relationship between *Geist* and consciousness and in his discussions of the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* and the larger system in general.<sup>82</sup>

The realization of the *Phenomenology*'s aspiration to provide a universally valid account of consciousness and *Geist* and to unite these to ensure the universality of its own claims might thus be realized only in the later system, in which consciousness as the appearance of *Geist* on the one hand, and *Geist* as unconditioned truth on the other hand are speculatively united to ensure the universality and necessity of its categories as well as that of all philosophical knowledge.

### 3.22 Conclusion

The difference in the interpretations that Brandom, Pippin and Houlgate provide of the relationship between consciousness and *Geist* in the *Phenomenology* seems to mirror Hegel's own ambiguity on the issue. Brandom seems to fully commit to consciousness over *Geist* within a pragmatist framework and thereby challenges the universality of Hegel's statements, his claim to possessing a universal criterion by which to judge the normative value of metaconcepts—including socio-political norms—and thereby potentially undermines the claim to universal validity of his own pragmatism and his reading of Hegel. Meanwhile, Pippin criticizes Brandom for contradicting Hegel's universalist aspirations and for potentially contradicting himself methodologically. Nevertheless, Pippin's commitment to explaining *Geist* in terms of consciousness could trigger the challenge that he is rendering the knowledge claims of Hegel's project contingent.

In contrast, Houlgate maintains that Hegel at least aspires to but fails to leave behind the notion of consciousness as subject of philosophy in the *Phenomenology*. Houlgate thus draws attention to Hegel's ambiguity about the relationship between consciousness and *Geist* in this early

work and problematizes the consequences that this entails for its own knowledge claims in comparison to those of the *Logic* and the encyclopedic system.

While Brandom, Pippin and Houlgate agree that the *Phenomenology* is supposed to prepare the philosopher for thinking the system's categorical content, it remains debatable how the *Phenomenology* aims to achieve this. One's answer to this question might depend on whether one believes that the *Phenomenology* succeeds in motivating its reader to think of the true subject of philosophical thought as being the same *Geist* that is described as the *Phenomenology*'s categorical contents. In any case, the fact that Hegel transferred large parts of the conceptual determinations of the *Phenomenology* into the encyclopedic system suggests that he thought of major sections of the *Phenomenology* as successfully describing what he later defined as *Geist*'s absolute knowledge.<sup>83</sup>

## Notes

- 1 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Inwood, Michael, transl., intro., comm., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- 2 While the translation 'mind' might deprive *Geist* of its external dimension, 'spirit' has religious connotations that are at odds with Hegel's fundamentally conceptual project.
- 3 Sebastian Stein, "Hegel's notion of philosophy: The concept-based unity of self-referential universality and differentiated particularity", in Sebastian Stein, Joshua Wretzel (eds.), *Hegel's Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2021).
- 4 Cf. Hegel, "Logic", p. 29.
- 5 Cf. Stein, "Hegel's Notion of Philosophy".
- 6 Kant, "Critique of Pure Reason", p. 450.
- 7 Kant, "Critique of Pure Reason", p. 347.
- 8 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Paul Guyer, Allen Wood transl., ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 349.
- 9 Kant, "Critique of Pure Reason", p. 153ff.
- 10 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre 1794* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1997), pp. 76–77.
- 11 And thus in his definition of freedom, it does so arbitrarily *and* necessarily at once.
- 12 Fichte, „Wissenschaftslehre 1794“, p. 24ff.
- 13 Fichte, „Wissenschaftslehre 1794“, p. 13.
- 14 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Wissenschaftslehre in ihrem allgemeinen Umrisse (1810)* (in Fichtes Werke, Berlin: Frommann-Holzboog, 1971), p. 696.
- 15 Fichte, „Wissenschaftslehre 1794“, p. 21.
- 16 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Wissenschaftslehre: Zweiter Vortrag im Jahre 1804* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1986), p. 76.
- 17 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Anweisung zum seligen Leben* in: *Johann Gottlieb Fichte sämtliche Werke*, Band 5, (Berlin 1845/1846: Frommann-Holzboog), p. 447.
- 18 Cf. Hegel, "Logic", pp. 46–47.
- 19 Cf. Hegel, "Logic", p. 695.
- 20 Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 193.

- 21 Robert B. Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2019), p. 1. On his 're re' method in his 'Tales of the Mighty Dead' see Stephen Houlgate, "Phenomenology and *De Re* Interpretation: A Critique of Brandom's Reading of Hegel", *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 17(1), pp. 29–47, p. 29ff.
- 22 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 5.
- 23 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 5.
- 24 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 425.
- 25 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 136.
- 26 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 246.
- 27 Furthermore, Brandom reads Hegel's project in a 'pragmatist' manner in the sense that "what confers conceptual content on acts, attitudes, and linguistic expressions is the role they play in the practices their subjects engage in". The world's conceptual contents are thus tied to conscious subjects' practices of understanding so that *cognition* is defined as an act of conscious subjects that actively confront an objective world: although cognizing subjects find a given, independent world before them, they are *active* in their understanding and conceptualizing of it. His pragmatism is 'holistic' because "it understands contents ... in terms of their role in a larger system comprising many such contents" (Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 4).
- 28 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 59.
- 29 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 300ff.
- 30 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 127, 444.
- 31 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 12.
- 32 Brandom is adamant that the status of collectively accepted norms might differ from the attitude agents have towards them (Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 14) so that the normative statuses of a consciousness depend on what the consciousness is for itself and for others (Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 14).
- 33 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 235.
- 34 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 17, 254. Re. This notion of universality, see Hegel's distinction between all-ness and universality.
- 35 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 675.
- 36 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 17.
- 37 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 226.
- 38 The abstract logical structure of Brandom's ontology seems to map onto Hegel's discussion of 'existence' rather than 'appearance' in *Science of Logic* insofar as Brandom posits individual consciousness absolute and rejects the notion that there exists a hidden, universal 'ground' that determines conscious existence.
- 39 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", pp. 4–5.
- 40 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 226.
- 41 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 28.
- 42 Robert Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel", *The European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 13(3), December 2005, pp. 319–462, p. 400.
- 43 Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel", p. 400, cf. Pippin, "Hegel's practical philosophy", p. 43.
- 44 Ibid., cf. Pippin, "Hegel's practical philosophy", p. 43.
- 45 Cf. Also Houlgate, "NDPR review of a spirit of trust".
- 46 Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel", p. 400.
- 47 Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel", pp. 400–401.
- 48 Pippin, "Hegel's practical philosophy", p. 43, cf. Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel", pp. 400–401.
- 49 Cf. Houlgate, "NDPR review of a spirit of trust".

- 50 Pippin, "Hegel's practical philosophy", p. 193, Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel", pp. 400–401.
- 51 Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel", pp. 400–401.
- 52 Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 9–10.
- 53 Pippin, "Hegel's Practical Philosophy", p. 17.
- 54 Pippin, "Hegel's Practical Philosophy", p. 39.
- 55 G. W. F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, T. M. Knox transl., S. Houlgate rev., ed., intro. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 57.
- 56 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, T. F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris transl., intro., notes, (Cambridge: Hackett, 1991), p. 236.
- 57 Hegel, "Encyclopedia I", p. 164.
- 58 G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, W. Wallace, A.V. Miller, transl. M. Inwood, rev., intro., comm., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 3.
- 59 Hegel, "Phenomenology", p. 438.
- 60 Cf. Sebastian Stein, *Choosing to Do the Right Thing: Aristotle, Kant and Hegel on Practical Normativity and the Realism-Constructivism Debate* in 'Hegel and contemporary political philosophy: Beyond Kantian Constructivism', J. Gledhill and S. Stein (eds.), (London: Routledge, 2020).
- 61 Hegel, "Encyclopedia I", p. 199ff.
- 62 Houlgate, "NDPR review of a spirit of trust".
- 63 Houlgate, "Hegel's phenomenology", p. 104. That is, the "truth" about consciousness (Houlgate, "De Re Interpretation", pp. 30–31.)
- 64 Cf. Pippin, "Brandom's Hegel", p. 381.
- 65 Houlgate, "Hegel's Phenomenology", p. 6.
- 66 Houlgate, "Hegel's Phenomenology", p. 145.
- 67 Hegel, "Phenomenology", §788ff.
- 68 Houlgate, "Hegel's Phenomenology", p. 145.
- 69 Cf. Hegel, "Logic", p. 32.
- 70 Insofar as this is what is indeed happening in the PhG.
- 71 Hegel, "Philosophy of Mind", p. 276.
- 72 Hegel, "Philosophy of Mind", p. 147ff.
- 73 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, G. di Giovanni, transl., ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 10.
- 74 Brandom, "Spirit of Trust", p. 7, 9.
- 75 Pippin, "Hegel's Practical Philosophy", p. 63.
- 76 Houlgate, "Hegel's Phenomenology", p. 103, 104.
- 77 Hegel, "Science of Logic", p. 10, 11.
- 78 Cf. Stein, "Hegel's Notion of Philosophy".
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Hegel, "Encyclopedia I".
- 81 Cf. Hegel, "Logic", p. 33.
- 82 Houlgate, "De Re Interpretation", p. 32, Stephen Houlgate, literature review of Robert B. Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust* at Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, <https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/a-spirit-of-trust-a-reading-of-hegels-phenomenology/>.
- 83 Against this, Houlgate, "NDPR Review of A Spirit of Trust".

## 4 Masters, Slaves, and Us

### The Ongoing Allure of the Struggle for Recognition

Mariana Teixeira

*For it may be that, in fact, the future of the world, and therefore the meaning of the present and the significance of the past, depend, in the final analysis, on the way in which the Hegelian writings are interpreted today.*

— Alexandre Kojève<sup>1</sup>

The nineteen paragraphs that make up the first section of chapter IV of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* are among the most influential Hegelian texts. The lordship–bondage relation (or the *master–slave dialectics*, as it is often called<sup>2</sup>) has prompted a broad range of interpretations and served as the springboard to much of the social and political philosophy since Hegel—both apologetic and critical in tone.<sup>3</sup> With powerful images such as that of the death struggle and of mutual recognition, echoes of this philosophical motif reverberate also in epoch-making historical events of the last one hundred years, reaching far beyond the archives of the history of philosophy.

The fact that this passage has been, and continues to be, interpreted in many different ways attests to its richness and ongoing allure. This chapter follows the story of lord and bondsman along three paradigmatic theoretical paths that marked the twentieth century and reverberate to the present day within critical social theory and practice (Section 4.2). An *agonistic* reading of this passage—one that takes it as a model (or contra-model) of the *struggle* for recognition between self and Other underpinning the intersubjective formation of human subjectivity—materialized in an interpretive tradition as potent as it is diversified. Critiques of social domination in terms of class, gender, and race, for example, were put forward by Alexandre Kojève, Simone de Beauvoir, and Frantz Fanon, respectively—all of whom took the *master–slave dialectic* as a philosophical starting point. Recent scholarship, on the other hand, has challenged such agonistic reading of Hegel’s famous passage and proposed a more *reconciliatory* interpretation, one that would be more in tune with Hegel’s text and intentions in the *Phenomenology* by focusing on the mutuality of

recognition rather than on the conflictual character of the death struggle at the origin of the lordship–bondage relation (Section 4.3).

Interestingly, however, both the agonistic and the reconciliatory readings find significant textual evidence in Hegel’s work to substantiate their interpretive claims, which nonetheless are at odds with one another. In the last part of the chapter (Section 4.4), we inquire into the reasons why these two opposing readings can be obtained from the same philosophical corpus. This is not least due to the composition of the *Phenomenology*: its peculiar *Darstellungsweise* makes the book distinctly prone to contrasting interpretations, but more than a matter of mere writing style, we argue that this mode of presentation is a philosophically charged recourse underpinning Hegel’s conceptual framework, one that ultimately leads to a discussion on the very subject of experience and knowledge.

Before exploring the particularities of each interpretive key, we briefly reconstruct section IV-A of the *Phenomenology* and see how Hegel portrays the struggle for recognition and the lordship–bondage relation (Section 4.1).

#### 4.1 Lordship and Bondage in the *Phenomenology*

The text that originated the famous *master–slave dialectic* appears in “Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness; Lordship and Bondage”, section A of chapter IV of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>4</sup> This is a crucial stage in Hegel’s characterization of the experiential path of consciousness: it is the “turning-point, where it leaves behind the colourful semblance of the sensory here-and-now and the empty night of the super-sensible Beyond, and steps out into the spiritual day of presence” (PS § 177). This is the moment when, after the repeated failures to ascertain the truth of the world of objects in the figures of sense certainty (I), perception (II) and understanding (III), consciousness takes *itself* as its object. As both the subject and the object of knowledge, it becomes *self-consciousness*. And “with self-consciousness”, writes Hegel, “we have now entered into the native realm of truth” (PS § 167).

Since it is among the most famous texts in Hegel’s *oeuvre*, an exhaustive reconstruction of IV-A will be dispensed with here. To understand what is at stake in its many different interpretations, however, it will be useful to describe in broad lines the basic movement of this section, which can be further divided into two major parts: one exploring *the concept of recognition* (§§ 178–184) and the other dealing specifically with the *lordship–bondage relation* (§§ 185–196).

The first part is where Hegel presents the *pure concept* of recognition (PS § 185), according to which “[s]elf-consciousness is *in* and *for itself* when, and by the fact that, it is *in* and *for itself* for another self-consciousness; that is, it is only as something recognized” (PS § 178). The movement unfolds as follows: in a first moment, one self-consciousness

faces another self-consciousness and, at the same time, loses itself and finds itself in the other. This is a *twofold otherness*: “it finds itself as an *other* essence”, and sees the other not as an essence, “but in the *other* sees *its own self*” (PS § 179). This otherness then has to be *aufgehoben*, sublated, in an equally twofold manner: “*first*, it must proceed to sublimate *the other* independent essence in order thereby to become certain of *itself* as the essence; *secondly*, in so doing it proceeds to sublimate *its own self*, for this other is itself” (PS § 180). This twofold sublation of the twofold otherness is also a *twofold return into itself*:

*first*, through the sublation, it receives back its own self, for by sublating *its* otherness it again becomes equal to itself; but *secondly*, it equally gives the other self-consciousness back to it again, for it found itself in the other, it sublates this Being of *itself* in the other, thus lets the other again go free.

(PS § 181)

Hegel underscores that this is not a unilateral move or doing by one of the poles: “the movement is simply the double movement of the two self-consciousnesses ... one-sided doing would be useless because what is supposed to happen can only come about through both” (PS § 182). *Both are object and subject of recognition*: “the doing has a double sense not only because it is directed *on itself* as well as *on the other*, but also because it is inseparably the *doing of the one* as well as *of the other*” (PS § 183). Each self-consciousness is, for the other, the mediation with itself; this mediation alone allows for each to see itself, and the other, as an essence for itself. Thus, for Hegel, “[t]hey recognize themselves as *mutually recognizing one another*” (PS § 184).

This reciprocal recognition is not, however, how each self-consciousness immediately experiences this process. In the second part of the section (§§ 185–196), in the lordship-bondage passage, Hegel explores how this movement appears *for self-consciousness*.

At first, “the process will present the side of the *inequality* of the two ..., one being only recognized, the other only recognizing” (PS § 185). Each self-consciousness seeks to assert its self-certainty or its being-for-itself merely through the exclusion from itself of all that is other, and “[w]hat is other for it is as an unessential object, marked with the character of the negative” (PS § 185). Whereas each self-consciousness exists, for the other, as an unessential object, each is nonetheless also a self-consciousness that claims to be the essential; “[e]ach is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other” (PS § 186). In their reciprocal claims affirming their own independence and negating the independence of the other, a confrontation between them arises.

To present oneself as the essential, however, means to negate one’s determinate existence, one’s attachment to the immediacy of life. In order

to ascertain their independence, “the relationship of the two self-consciousnesses is determined in such a way that they *prove* themselves and each other through a life-and-death combat” (PS § 187). In this confrontation, thus, each self-consciousness seeks the death of the other and, for that, is compelled to put its own life at stake—a condition to prove one’s freedom (PS § 187). “The individual who has not risked his life”, writes Hegel, “may well be recognized as a *person*; but it has not attained to the truth of this recognition as recognition of an independent self-consciousness” (PS § 187). If this struggle to the death leads to the annihilation of one of the opponents, however, the movement toward reciprocal recognition will never be complete, not even for the surviving self-consciousness, because each of them engaged in this struggle, in the first place, to elevate their self-certainty to truth not only in themselves but also *in the other* (PS § 187). In other words, the recognition that was initially demanded is forever denied with the death—an abstract negation—of the other self-consciousness.

The experience of the death struggle dissolves the simple unity of the immediate self-consciousness into two moments, which now appear as opposed: the independent self-consciousness that is for-itself and the dependent self-consciousness that is only for-another; “the former is the *lord*, the latter is the *bondsman*” (PS § 189). A crucial difference between them lies in their relationship to their own desires and the world of objects that might satisfy them. When confronting a thing in the world as the object of desire, both lord and bondsman negate it, but they do it in completely different ways: the bondsman *works* on the thing *for the enjoyment of the lord*; the lord *enjoys* the thing *worked on by the bondsman*. They relate to the thing, hence, through the mediation of the other, and they relate to one another through the mediation of the thing (PS § 190). The bondsman could not abstract from the thing in the death struggle, proving to be dependent on it and chained to his natural existence; the lord, however, consumes the thing, eliminates it, and is not, thus, confronted with the independence of thinghood:

to the lord alone belongs Being-for-itself, the essence; he is the pure negative power for which the thing is nothing, and thus the pure, essential doing in this relationship; to the bondsman belongs a doing that is not pure, but unessential.

(PS § 191)

This is, however, only the first stage on the way toward “recognition proper” (PS § 192). The moment is still lacking when it becomes clear that the lord cannot be “certain of *Being-for-itself* as the truth” if the object that constitutes the truth of his self-certainty is the unessential consciousness of the bondsman (PS § 192). For the lord depends on the bondsman—not only for the satisfaction of his needs but also for his recognition



as an independent being, and thus, “[t]he *truth* of the independent consciousness is accordingly the *servile consciousness*” (PS § 193).

This remarkable reversal happens on the side of the bondsman as well:

This servile consciousness does indeed appear initially *outside* of itself and not as the truth of self-consciousness. But just as lordship showed that its essence is the inverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the contrary of what it immediately is; as a consciousness *driven back* into itself, it will withdraw into itself and be converted into true independence.

(PS § 193)

This process of inversion, by which the servile consciousness shows itself as truly independent, emerges from a combination of the *fear of death* experienced by the bondsman and the *cultivating labor* he carries out in the service for the lord. In the fear of death, consciousness undergoes an internal dissolution, an absolute fluidification that unbinds it from natural existence *in general*; in the cultivating work, it unbinds itself from natural existence in all *individual moments*. Differently from the lord’s consumption of the object, which is “only a disappearance, for it lacks the *objective* side or *subsistence*”, the bondsman’s work is “desire *held in check*”; in work, “[t]he negative relation to the object becomes its *form* and something *permanent*” (PS § 195). By means of his transformative labor of the natural material world in order to create the products that will satisfy the lord’s demands, an activity that originated with his fear of death, the bondsman comes to develop his own capacity to create and give form to an independent object. In this cultivating activity, he comes to see himself in the products he creates; he rediscovers himself and thereby “arrives at the consciousness that it itself is in and for itself” (PS § 196).

So far, the lordship–bondage relation has been reconstructed in Hegel’s own terminology, which indeed leaves room for a myriad of different interpretations. Readers have since asked what Hegel was *actually* referring to when talking about a lord and a bondsman. The significance of the lord–bondsman relation within the overall movement of the *Phenomenology* is also an object of controversy: What is the role of this relation in a work characterized by the relentless succession of figures that are presented and subsequently revealed in their falsehood?

In the next section, we explore the fruits of a reading that, in spite of its admitted inventiveness, became the dominant and most prolific interpretation of Hegel’s text.

## 4.2 *Struggle for Recognition: The Agonistic Reading*

Hegel’s treatment of the lordship and bondage relation in IV-A became known as the “master–slave dialectic” and was seen as the key moment of the

*Phenomenology* (and even of Hegel's oeuvre as a whole) in the wake of the reading popularized by Alexandre Kojève. Having left a mark on generations of philosophers and social theorists who saw in Hegel's text the possibility of an intersubjective and conflictual foundation for human subjectivity, his heavily Marxist interpretation is key to understanding other influential readings that make up the agonistic tradition hegemonic in the twentieth century.

#### 4.2.1 Kojève and the Worker as Other

Kojève delivered his now-famous lectures on the *Phenomenology* between 1933 and 1939 at the École Pratique des Hautes Études at the Sorbonne. His course had an indelible impact on a whole generation of intellectuals and is considered a crucial event for the subsequent Hegel *renaissance* in France.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, until the first French version of the *Phenomenology* appeared in two volumes in 1939 and 1941, translated by Jean Hyppolite, the French audience that did not read German had to mostly rely on Kojève's lectures, which were conceived as a line by line reading of the *Phenomenology* followed by an impromptu translation and his own commentaries.<sup>6</sup> A collection of the lectures and students' notes was assembled by Raymond Queneau and published in 1947 with the misleadingly neutral title *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*. It includes, "In Place of an Introduction", a commented translation of IV-A, which had been singled out by Kojève to appear in January 1939 in the journal *Mesures*, indicating the importance he attributed to the section on lordship and bondage, thus elevated to the very key to understanding the whole book. The translation-commentary is, like Kojève's lectures on the *Phenomenology*, unorthodox for various reasons: it displays unusual and interpretively charged word choices, the whole prose is interposed with Kojève's own remarks and commentaries, and he even omits parts of Hegel's text.<sup>7</sup>

Kojève recounts the lordship–bondage passage—self-consciousness's encounter with another self-consciousness, the death struggle between them, the capitulation of one self-consciousness when confronted with the fear of death, the ensuing asymmetrical relation between an idle lord who consumes objects and an active bondsman who produces them, and the twist by which the bondsman is revealed as the true independent self-consciousness and the lord appears as the servile self-consciousness—with *the worker exploited in capitalism* as the bondsman, or, in his words, the slave.

Whereas for Hegel the experience of the lordship–bondage relation then leads to the figures of Stoicism, Scepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness (IV-B), and thereafter to the realms of Reason (V), Spirit (VI), Religion (VII), and Absolute Knowledge (VIII), Kojève offers an alternative narrative of how the slave's consciousness of his own autonomy plays out. He asserts that a new struggle for recognition is needed for the slave to assert his independent self-consciousness vis-à-vis the master:

in transforming the World by this work, the Slave transforms himself, too, and thus creates the new objective conditions that permit him to take up once more the liberating Struggle for recognition that he refused in the beginning for fear of death.<sup>8</sup>

The proof of human freedom and independence lies, for Kojève, in the willingness to risk one's life "for an essentially nonvital end"<sup>9</sup> and thus to overcome mere biological, animal life. This stance is formulated in more detail in four lectures of the academic year 1934–1935 published as an appendix to *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, in which Kojève explicitly talks about such "final Struggle for Recognition":

The Slave is obliged to overcome Mastery by a nondialectical overcoming of the Master who obstinately persists in his (human) identity to himself – that is, by annulling him or putting him to death. And this annulling is what is manifested in and by the final Struggle for Recognition, which necessarily implies the Risk of life on the part of the freed Slave. This Risk, moreover, is what completes the liberation which was begun by his Work, by introducing in him the constituent-element (*Moment*) of Mastery which he lacked.<sup>10</sup>

Kojève reenacts here first death struggle, but now with the slave finally ready, after having cultivated his laboring activity, to risk his life and to prove that he is more than a natural being—that he, too, is a spiritual being. Echoing both Marx and Heidegger, Kojève thus idiosyncratically combined the themes of class struggle as the motor force of history and the mortality of the *Dasein*, applying revolutionary and existential overtones to his reading of Hegel. Kojève saw in the laboring bondsman who "arrives at the consciousness that it itself is in and for itself" (PS § 196) an extraordinarily fitting depiction of the situation of the salaried worker in capitalism and his destiny as the member of a class that will abolish all classes and guide humanity to the *end of history*. Kojève, hence, turns the *Phenomenology* into a work of philosophical anthropology in which the slave's labor impels him to engage in a renewed struggle with the master for the recognition of his autonomy achieved by dominating nature; this "final Struggle for Recognition" would contain the only possibility of liberation from social domination and towards reciprocal recognition:

[i]t is in and by the final Struggle, in which the working ex-Slave acts as combatant for the sake of glory alone, that the free Citizen of the universal and homogeneous State is created; being both Master and Slave, he is no longer either the one or the other, but is the unique 'synthetical' or 'total' Man.<sup>11</sup>

The extent to which the influence of Hegel's lordship–bondage passage exerted a direct influence on Marx himself remains an open question;<sup>12</sup> in any case, it was certainly with Marxist lenses that Kojève read and interpreted Hegel's work.<sup>13</sup> This class-centred reading became the standard version of the *master–slave dialectic* from then on—often taken (by advocates and detractors alike) as Hegel's own formulation. It was Kojève's idiosyncratic rendition of the lordship–bondage passage—as the struggle between master/capitalist and slave/worker in a society marked by class domination—that served as a contrast foil for critics of gender and racial domination to develop their own versions of this struggle for recognition. In the following sections, two paradigmatic cases are explored: Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon, both of whom engage directly with the *master–slave dialectic* in works whose importance to the history and the present of feminist and anti-racist theory and practice cannot be overestimated.

#### 4.2.2 *Beauvoir and the Woman as Other*

The *master–slave dialectic* plays a central role in Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 *The Second Sex*.<sup>14</sup> In the introduction of the now-classic book, inquiring into the very question, *What is a woman?* Beauvoir draws on the insight of a fundamentally intersubjective formation of human subjectivity: “[t]he category of *Other* is as original as consciousness itself.... No group ever defines itself as One without at the same time setting up the *Other* opposite itself”.<sup>15</sup> There is also for Beauvoir a basic conflictual dimension to this process:

[t]hings become clear ... if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed only in being opposed—he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object.<sup>16</sup>

To be sure, the Hegel Beauvoir refers to here is read through the lens of the Kojève's idiosyncratic interpretation. Following Kojève's Hegel, Beauvoir considers that one self-consciousness always posits itself initially as the essential and the other as the inessential; as the second self-consciousness has an opposing reciprocal claim, she notes, throughout history, a series of events—wars, treatises—generally remove “the absolute meaning from the idea of the *Other* and bring out its relativity; whether one likes it or not, individuals and groups have no choice but to recognize the reciprocity of their relation”.<sup>17</sup> For Beauvoir, eventual reciprocal recognition would be the expected result of both individual and collective processes of identity formation.

In the case in point in *The Second Sex*, man is the Subject, the Absolute, essential, and woman is an object, the *Other*, inessential;<sup>18</sup> she is an incidental (Saint Thomas) or naturally defective (Aristotle) being.<sup>19</sup> Up to this

point, Beauvoir's considerations are in accord with the Kojévian philosophical model of anthropogenesis through reciprocal recognition after the violent encounter between two subjects. It would be hasty, however, to conclude that Beauvoir unreservedly adopts the *master-slave dialectic* as a model for the man-woman relation. It appears, rather, as a contra-model: the relation between man and woman, differently from that between master and slave, is not mutual—not even in an agonistic, conflictual sense. Man, asserting himself as the essential, denies at the same time any relativity to his other, defining woman as *pure alterity*:<sup>20</sup> “[t]he relation of the two sexes is not that of two electrical poles”, for while woman is the negative, the particular, man is at once the positive *and the neutral*, that is, the universal.<sup>21</sup> Woman is thus *an alterity without reciprocity*; she is not a *relative* other like the Kojévian slave: she is the *absolute Other*. While the slave is *inferior* to the master, woman is purely *different* from man.

In contrast to the Kojévian slave, moreover, for Beauvoir woman becomes subordinate to man without a struggle to the death between them: when man posits himself as for-itself, as a subject that negates woman as its other, he is not met with a reciprocal claim and thus the challenge of a struggle for the death. The Kojévian slave surrenders his freedom to protect his life in the face of death, but at least he considers risking his life, and this fear, connected to his cultivating labor, prompts him to achieve a form of self-consciousness and to see himself as a for-itself. Beauvoir's woman, by contrast, does not engage in the struggle to prove to man (as well as to herself) that she, too, has goals above mere biological survival; risking her life is out of the question from the start. In addition, woman in her servitude does not serve man by means of the production of objects in a creative intercourse with the natural, material world; that is, woman does not cultivate herself through productive labor. She is, rather, identified with nature itself; she does not become a “fellow to the workman”,<sup>22</sup> who can begin to attain the status of a subject in his creative labor. The relationship between man and woman is therefore static; woman is fixed as the absolute Other in her relation to man.

Similarly, the possible way out of this relation of subordination is different for Kojève and Beauvoir. For Kojève, as mentioned earlier, since the slave already works on material objects, all he needs is to assert his being-for-itself by “annulling” the master.<sup>23</sup> For Beauvoir, however, emancipation cannot come from this heroic final struggle for recognition because she does not rely, like Kojève, on a dualistic ontology between Nature and *Geist*: for her, transcendence can only be attained *through*, instead of *against*, immanence. The human body is for her a *situation* rather than a *thing*, it is “the instrument of our hold on the world”.<sup>24</sup> Biological life, thus, is not seen as merely passive matter destined to be surpassed:

In truth, all human existence is transcendence and immanence at the same time; to go beyond itself, it must maintain itself; to thrust itself

toward the future, it must integrate the past into itself; and while relating to others, it must confirm itself in itself. These two moments are implied in every living movement.<sup>25</sup>

For Beauvoir, humanity is a historical becoming defined not by how it *denies*, but rather “by the way it *assumes* natural facticity.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, if life—with the promise of decay and death that necessarily accompanies it—is not the enemy, woman’s emancipation would look like something quite different than her proving to man that she, too, is above and beyond mere immanence. Emphasizing transcendence is thus but a *moment*—if a crucial one—in woman’s liberation process. A further moment would involve abandoning herself to the contemplation of the world and then creating it anew.<sup>27</sup>

Hence, a final struggle for recognition, as proposed by Kojève, would not satisfy the requirements to end woman’s subordination: in resolutely affirming her transcendence over her facticity, woman could achieve a position similar to man’s, but as sheer transcendence, man is not free either. Woman does not have to become a subject “like man”; both man and woman have to live as subjects *and* objects, experiencing their ambiguity in a permanent tension: “tomorrow’s humankind”, writes Beauvoir, “will live the future in its flesh and in its freedom”.<sup>28</sup>

Kojève’s final struggle for recognition is also insufficient because Beauvoir’s conception of freedom is not merely agonistic but also intersubjective in a strong, reciprocal sense: freedom, writes Beauvoir in the conclusion of her 1947 *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, “can be achieved only through the freedom of others”.<sup>29</sup> This “other” is not nature, matter, or one’s body: it is another person, also made up of both immanence and transcendence. In short, for Beauvoir, a *subject* does not find its other in an *object*: a *subject-object* finds its other—that which allows for it to go beyond and then rejoin itself—in *another subject-object*: “recognizing each other as subject, each will remain an *other* for the other”.<sup>30</sup>

It is noteworthy that, taking distance from Kojève, Beauvoir seems to thread closer to Hegel. It is as if she corrected Kojève’s account of the *master-slave dialectic*, at least with respect to the Nature-*Geist* dualism and the heroic resolution of the struggle for recognition (a resolution that is thus also ultimately monological, not intersubjective, since it relies on the slave’s individual labor on material objects, on one hand, and on the annihilation of the master, on the other). These are central features of the *master-slave dialectic* for Kojève but not for Beauvoir—or for Hegel.

#### 4.2.3. Fanon and the Black Man as Other

Writing around the same period as Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon also critically engages with the *master-slave dialectic*. He alludes to this conflictual and

intersubjective model of human subjectivity formation in vogue in the wake of Kojève's lectures on the *Phenomenology* in several passages of *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). But it is in the last section of the book—"The Black Man and Hegel"—that Fanon addresses this topic in a direct manner, as the following excerpt shows:

In its immediacy, consciousness of self is simple being-for-itself. In order to win the certainty of oneself, the incorporation of the concept of recognition is essential. Similarly, the other is waiting for recognition by us, in order to burgeon into the universal consciousness of self. Each consciousness of self is in quest of absoluteness. It wants to be recognized as a primal value without reference to life, as a transformation of subjective certainty (*Gewissheit*) into objective truth (*Wahrheit*).<sup>31</sup>

Fanon goes on to characterize the struggle to the death that ensues from this situation: "[i]n a fierce struggle I am willing to feel the shudder of death, the irreversible extinction, but also the possibility of impossibility".<sup>32</sup> He underscores, in a Kojévian manner, that only by risking one's life can one achieve a properly human reality, a freedom that is beyond life taken as a mere physical being. Once again, however, the *master-slave dialectic* is not simply transposed to the relation between the White and the Black man. For Fanon, the Kojévian slave is not a model but above all a contrast foil to the situation of the Black man, like for Beauvoir, the Kojévian slave is a contrast foil to the situation of the woman. Fanon sees, as does Beauvoir, an absolute reciprocity between the poles of the *master-slave dialectic*, whereas the relation between the White and Black man presents no such primary equality.<sup>33</sup>

In Martinique, to be sure, slavery is in the past and the Black man is, in legal terms at least, as free as the White man. There is, indeed, a formal recognition between them. Being merely formal, however, this recognition is incomplete and entirely unsatisfactory. For Fanon, this is because the Black man "did not fight for his freedom";<sup>34</sup> he was freed from slavery and recognized as a person without risking his life in a death struggle. In Fanon's poetically charged words:

The black man is a slave who was allowed to assume a master's attitude.

The white man is a master who allowed his slaves to eat at his table.

Or

The upheaval reached the black man from the outside. The black man was acted upon. Values that were not engendered by his actions, values not resulting from the systolic gush of his blood, whirled around him in a colorful dance.<sup>35</sup>

As for Kojève, also for Fanon it is only through struggle that the slave—here, the free Black man—will be able to achieve true, reciprocal recognition. And the Black man desires this struggle: “[u]nsure whether the white man considers him as consciousness in-itself-for-itself, he is constantly preoccupied with detecting resistance, opposition, and contestation”;<sup>36</sup> “[t]he former slave wants his humanity to be challenged; he is looking for a fight; he wants a brawl”.<sup>37</sup> It is not a matter, then, of a lack of willingness to engage in the struggle; on the contrary, the Black man’s situation is so unbearable that

[t]here is only one solution: to fight. He will embark on this struggle not as the result of a Marxist or idealistic analysis but because quite simply he cannot conceive his life otherwise than as a kind of a combat against exploitation, poverty, and hunger.<sup>38</sup>

In contrast to Kojève’s depiction of an imminent, almost inevitable *final struggle for recognition*, however, Fanon considers that it is now “too late: the Black Frenchman is doomed to hold his tongue and bare his teeth”.<sup>39</sup> While in the Kojévian rendition of Hegel’s famous figure the slave turns his back to the master toward the object (i.e., his creative labor), historically, says Fanon, the Black man turns away from the object toward the White master.<sup>40</sup> Having been socialized in a world where the White man is the model of identification of everything that is good, pure, and active, the Black man shares the same European collective unconsciousness and wants to be like the White master.<sup>41</sup> Unlike in Kojève’s version of the Hegelian figure, hence, the Black slave finds no liberation in his productive activity. He finds himself paralyzed, “less independent than the Hegelian slave”,<sup>42</sup> wishing to be like the White master and unable to realize the movement toward self-consciousness. “After having been a slave to the White man, he enslaves himself”,<sup>43</sup> says Fanon. He is interested first and foremost in unveiling, with recourse to psychoanalytic conceptual tools, the mechanisms by which the dominated come to accept their own domination—that is, the phenomenon of *alienation*, which prevents the development that could lead to reciprocal recognition.

Fanon thus rejects the Kojévian view of the creative labor on the natural world as the first decisive step toward the formation of an independent self-consciousness for the slave, which would then have to be imposed on the master by means of a renewed death struggle. Black man’s true liberation depends, for Fanon, first of all on a process of *self-disalienation* able to free him from his fixation with the White man and to unlock his own universal potentialities, but differently from Kojève and his account based on a Nature–*Geist* dualism, this would not be achieved through the slave’s subject-object relation with the material world elevating him above the realm of nature. For Fanon, this possibility has been historically debunked. Moreover, like for Beauvoir and treading closer to Hegel, Fanon



advocates for a properly *intersubjective*—if conflictual and at times even violent<sup>44</sup>—unfolding of the struggle for recognition, the ultimate goal of which is not self-affirmation of one pole through the annihilation of the other but, rather, a genuine communication between them in a world freed from instrumentalization and subjugation of one by another.<sup>45</sup>

During the twentieth century, the *master–slave dialectic* became a favorite motif not only for Marxist theorists interested in class struggle but also among critical thinkers concerned with other forms of social domination, like those based on gender and racial relations. It provided them with a concise and, at the same time, elaborate story of the human desire for recognition and the struggle it calls forth.

As the examples of Beauvoir and Fanon indicate, however, the version of Hegel's lordship–bondage *Phenomenology* passage that became so disseminated was strongly (although critically) indebted to Kojève's reading. Many Hegel scholars have since pointed out the distance between this interpretation and the original text when read in the context of Hegel's oeuvre and his overall philosophical framework. Whereas Kojève and his readers place the lordship–bondage relation as the pivotal moment in Hegel's work, other authors argue that the famous passage is only that: *a moment*, meaning that it is deficient and thus bound to be surpassed by the subsequent figures of the *Phenomenology*. Situated in an early stage of the book, the famous section cannot, according to this view, be taken in isolation as the key to interpreting the entire movement of consciousness from sense certainty to Absolute Knowledge, and this decontextualized reading would lead to important misinterpretations of Hegel's theory of recognition.

### 4.3 Struggle for *Recognition*: The Reconciliatory Reading

The dominant, Kojévian reading of the *master–slave dialectic* has been challenged from different theoretical perspectives.<sup>46</sup> The line of argument addressed here, the *reconciliatory reading*,<sup>47</sup> bears on a criticism of the eminently *agonistic* character of this view of recognition. As evidenced earlier, Kojève's interpretation and the ones developed in dialogue with it place great emphasis on the conflictual dynamics that underlie the process of consciousness becoming *self-consciousness*. Representatives of the reconciliatory reading criticize such interpretation by arguing that the death struggle leading to the lordship and bondage relation refers to what Hegel saw as a deficient, even “corrupted”<sup>48</sup> stage in the experiential development of self-consciousness, one that must eventually give way to a mutual, reciprocal form of recognition. Kojève neglects, it is argued, precisely those parts of the text where the mutuality of recognition in Hegel's view appears most clearly.

In fact, Kojève pays little attention to the passages of IV-A that precede the lordship–bondage relation, namely, §§ 178–184,<sup>49</sup> in which Hegel

develops the *pure concept of recognition*. The fact that Kojève simply leaps over these paragraphs in his 1939 translation-commentary is an evident symptom of this neglect and attests to the partiality of his reading. What the reconciliatory critique of Kojève's agonistic interpretation argues, however, is not only that it is incomplete. "Omitting critical sections", Richard Lynch writes, it is "skewed to give a one-sided reading" that "mislead[s] us, taking us away from its true significance".<sup>50</sup> It is not a matter of mere lack of completeness but of an actual *distortion* that is "at odds with Hegel's own views",<sup>51</sup> which is due to the content and the particular character of the passage that is both downplayed in Kojève's lectures and entirely neglected in his translation-commentary.

In terms of content, Kojève's reading obliterates virtually all the passages where the mutual nature of recognition is underscored by Hegel. He leaves out of his commentary, for example, the following excerpt, which has become central to reconciliatory approaches to Hegelian recognition:

Each is to the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and joins together with itself, and each is to itself, and to the other, an immediate essence that is for itself, which at the same time is for itself only through this mediation. They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing one another*.

(PS § 184)

As a result, Kojève's interpretation of IV-A would be "much more confrontational, one-dimensional, and uni-directional than in fact is the case in Hegel's story".<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Kojève (over)emphasizes the moment of the death struggle to the point that liberation is only possible in his account via a final struggle for recognition where the working slave imposes its independence attained in labor onto the idle master. This renewed combat is, of course, absent in Hegel's book, and the reconciliatory reading insists that it would not lead to a resolution of the problem; quite to the contrary, "[a] second battle, as Kojève would have it, is not progress toward a resolution of the dialectical conflict but the (perpetual) reiteration of the refusal of recognition".<sup>53</sup> By regressing to the early stage of the struggle, Kojève would then keep self-consciousness in its state of misrecognition of the Other<sup>54</sup>—and thus also of itself.

The authors advocating a reconciliatory reading of Hegel's theory of recognition agree that the agonistic conclusion drawn by Kojève about the need for a final death struggle is textually unwarranted in the *Phenomenology*. They disagree, however, as to what role the death struggle actually plays in the book's narrative. For Michael Monahan, it is but a contingent "detour from our 'proper' path",<sup>55</sup> simply an illustration of "a way in which we can fail to manifest the ideal of pure recognition".<sup>56</sup> As recognition "gone wrong",<sup>57</sup> the *master-slave dialectic* is for Monahan similar to Rawls' *original position*: as "'just-so' stories", they are "useful

fictions designed to facilitate certain kinds of theoretical maneuvering”.<sup>58</sup> In other words, he considers that the death struggle and the lordship-bondage passage are entirely dispensable within the narrative of the *Phenomenology*; they do not play any role except to illustrate an argument that, in any case, could have been made otherwise.<sup>59</sup> This stance seems to be at odds, however, with Hegel’s insistence on the necessity by which one dialectical figure follows the other in the development of Spirit. Richard Lynch seems to share this view to some extent: although he sees the lordship-bondage passage as a necessary moment in the movement of the concept of recognition, it is not clear from his approach *why* this is so. With the death struggle being characterized as a dead end, it does not seem to be able to produce a further, more complex moment, and thus remains barren and ultimately expendable. Nicholas Germana, on the other hand, tends to reject pure contingency or accidental detours in the experiential path of consciousness; he thus prefers to call misrecognition an *immature* rather than *corrupted* (as for Monahan) form of consciousness.<sup>60</sup> Although the lordship-bondage moment thus appears as a necessary stage, Germana likewise refrains from exploring the specific function it plays in the broader context of the *Phenomenology*; most important for him is that the end station of the Spirit’s path is mutual recognition.

In their reading of IV-A, thus, the three authors mentioned tend to argue for the displacement of the emphasis Kojève attributed to the *master-slave dialectic* and the death struggle it entails to the neglected part of the chapter, that is, the passages on *pure recognition*. This seems, however, to conserve the unilaterality found in Kojève’s own interpretation, if only with an inverted signal: mutual recognition is now one-sidedly placed in the foreground to the detriment of the agonistic moment present in the development of consciousness. Reconciliation replaces conflict as *the* true significance of IV-A.

One would be better equipped to understand the role each moment plays, perhaps, by taking into account that the difference between them is, as mentioned above, as much connected with their content as with their character, by which we mean the *perspective* from which each story is told.

#### 4.4 Hegel’s *Darstellungsweise*: Masters, Slaves, and Us

Following the Spirit’s experiential path, the *Phenomenology* has been described as a philosophical *Bildungsroman*. The book is, in Jean Hyppolite’s words, “the novel of philosophic formation; it follows the development of consciousness, which, renouncing its first beliefs, reaches through its experiences the properly philosophic point of view, that of absolute knowledge”.<sup>61</sup> What makes this work particularly difficult to navigate is *how* the story of consciousness is recounted, since there are two narrative modes at play throughout the book: one recounts the experiences undergone by

natural consciousness *from the viewpoint of experiencing consciousness itself*, while the other describes this movement *from the viewpoint of philosophical consciousness*, or the philosopher, who has already achieved absolute knowledge. The succession of figures described in the *Phenomenology*, while painfully erratic for the experiencing consciousness, appears for the philosopher in its meaningful development.

It is not always easy to discern one narrative mode from the other, as Hegel alternates between them without giving the reader unequivocally clear signs, requiring one to carefully interpret the content and context of each passage. Some terminological indications can help the reader identify who is telling the consciousness's formative story at one given point. Philosophical consciousness is at work, for example, when something is described as it is "for us" (*für uns*):<sup>62</sup> "we" already underwent the experiences natural consciousness is now going through.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, when something appears "for consciousness" or "for it" (*für es*), it usually means that it is being recounted as the subject of the experience is experiencing it – and is, thus, a description that will be overcome in a higher, more complex figure of consciousness. Terms such as "appear" (*erscheinen*) and "at first" (*zunächst*) also hint at something taken as true, but likely to be revealed as false, or at least partial, in the realm of absolute knowledge, home of the "concept" (*Begriff*).

As indicated earlier, Kojève leaps over the §§ 178–184 in his translation-commentary of IV-A; he resumes the text on § 185, where Hegel states that the pure *concept* of recognition "now has to be considered to see how its process appears for self-consciousness" (PS § 185). This excerpt indicates that the preceding exposition—on the "pure concept of recognition", omitted by Kojève—deals with recognition from the viewpoint of the philosopher, as it is *for us*; from § 185 on, the same process will then be described in its appearance, as it is *for it*, for the experiencing (natural) consciousness itself. Kojève, therefore, elides virtually all the description of the dialectical movement from the viewpoint of philosophical consciousness, limiting his exposition to the viewpoint of natural consciousness, for whom conflict takes on a larger role in the path of Spirit than mutuality.

Because of its focus on the perspective of the experiencing consciousness or, in other words, on the perspective of the participant, the agonistic interpretation has found incredible resonance in the works of thinkers and activists eager to transform the existing social order. This resonance can be referred not least to Hegel's indication that the bondsman or slave—the oppressed part of a social relation, as it were—has some sort of advantage over the lord or master, the oppressor. For in the movement of IV-A, as seen above, the bondsman is revealed as the essential self-consciousness, and the lord the inessential, servile self-consciousness. The suggestion that there is something (and something crucial) to be learned from the perspective of the subaltern subjects allows for a reading of Hegel's work

that reconstructs recognition theory in an original fashion: written from the viewpoint of the consciousness experiencing bondage or slavery—the Other: the Black man in a racist society, the woman in a patriarchal world, the proletarian in capitalism, and so on—such approaches may be better situated to reveal aspects of structural social domination that are not immediately accessible to *us*, the observer, the “neutral” philosophical consciousness. This is precisely the claim made by advocates for a situated epistemology, like the feminist standpoint theories, whose affinity with the *master–slave dialectics* has not gone unnoticed.<sup>64</sup>

If the peculiarity of Kojève’s agonistic reading (which emphasizes the *struggle* for recognition) lies in that he unilaterally adopts the viewpoint of natural consciousness, on the other hand, the advocates of the reconciliatory reading (emphasizing the struggle for *recognition*) can be said to also unilaterally adopt the viewpoint of philosophical consciousness, with reciprocity on the foreground. To put it more precisely, the reconciliatory reading adopts the perspective of a philosophical consciousness that forgot, negated abstractly without preserving, the (painful) experience it underwent as natural consciousness. Both readings, thus, the agonistic and the reconciliatory, are in some sense partial. But that does not mean that they are simply wrong, much less that they are not fruitful: their prolific *Wirkungsgeschichte* points otherwise, as this chapter has sought to demonstrate with the groundbreaking works of Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon.

#### 4.5 Concluding Remarks: Struggle *and* Recognition

As posited by Kojève’s agonistic reading of Hegel’s lordship–bondage passage, the *master–slave dialectic* remains, its manifold fruitfulness notwithstanding, a partial moment in the Spirit’s path. As false, it is at the same time a moment of the true—but not *as false*.<sup>65</sup> For Hegel, the false is a moment of the true only when its falsehood has been overcome (*aufgehoben*), in the sense of having been revealed in its falseness. Hence, taking the viewpoint of natural consciousness at face value would amount to taking the false (in its nondialectical, merely negative sense) as if it were the whole truth. Hence, the *master–slave dialectic* experienced by natural consciousness must be read in combination—fraught with resonance and dissonance—with the account of *mutual recognition* visible from the perspective of the philosophical consciousness. And the opposite is also true, as Lynch perceptively argues:

Nevertheless, we must not forget that social relations are also characterized by dominance and submission, mastery and slavery, as Kojève wants to emphasize. To close our eyes to this is to miss half of the significance of IV-A.... How and why are mutual recognition and mastery and slavery present *together*?<sup>66</sup>

Only when apprehended in its becoming, in the movement towards its overcoming, can a moment be said to already contain the totality. This requires that the viewpoints of both natural (experiencing) consciousness and philosophical (experienced) consciousness be taken into account, which is all but trivial. It is not an accident that the *Phenomenology* is considered one of the most puzzling works in the history of philosophy. The great challenge set by Hegel remains an inspiring, powerful one because it is, and wants to be, deeply entrenched in the present time and in our effort to grasp it in thought. The ongoing allure of Hegel's *master-slave dialectic* lies in the fact that, contrary to one of Kojève's most (in)famous claims, history, with its struggles and contradictions, has not come to an end—and that *capturing this movement as it is experienced is as vital as describing it as it is for us, philosophers*.

A final remark concerns the distance that Beauvoir and Fanon take with regard to Kojève, and which brings them closer to Hegel. One notes, from the earlier exposition, that both authors developed their influential accounts having Kojève's reading as a springboard and that they did so by pointing out how the relation between man/woman or between White/Black man contrasts with the master/slave relation according to (what they took to be) Hegel's view. Interestingly, however, in rejecting Kojève's plea for a final death struggle, both Beauvoir and Fanon are able to catch a glimpse of intersubjective recognition—at least in its potentiality. They take into account, hence, not only the perspective of natural consciousness, as can be said of Kojève's approach, but also the perspective of philosophical consciousness, thus retaining the dynamic intricacy characteristic of Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

## Notes

- 1 Alexandre Kojève, "Hegel, Marx and Christianity", transl. H. Gildin, *Interpretation*, 1 (1970 [1946]), p. 42.
- 2 The translation of *Herr* and *Knecht* by "master" and "slave", although not uncommon, is contested today by most Hegel scholars. When addressing not Hegel's text but, rather, its appropriation by authors like Alexandre Kojève, I retain the "master-slave" (*maître* and *esclave* in French) vocabulary considering that it is consistently employed in these contexts.
- 3 As Judith Butler puts it when addressing the Hegelian legacy in the works of Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida, "Hegel is not so easily dismissed, even by those who claim to be beyond him" (Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, p. 175).
- 4 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1952 [1807]), §§ 178–196, pp. 145–155; in English: G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (transl. M. Inwood, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018 [1807]), pp. 76–82. From now on, referred to as PS, followed by the corresponding paragraph number.
- 5 Georges Bataille, to give but one example, recounts being left "broken, pulverized, killed ten times over: suffocated and immobilized" from the impact

- of the lectures (Dominique Auffret *apud* James H. Nichols, *Alexandre Kojève: Wisdom at the End of History*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007, p. 21). Other registered participants of the seminars include Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan, and Eric Weil (Michael Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth-Century France*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 225–227). André Breton, Jean Hyppolite, and Raymond Aron, among others, were also said to have informally attended Kojève's seminar (Dominique Auffret, *Alexandre Kojève: La philosophie, l'État, la fin de l'Histoire*, Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1990, pp. 258 and 259; Raymond Aron, *Memoirs: Fifty Years of Political Reflection*, transl. G. Holoch, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990 [1983], p. 65).
- 6 Aron, "Memoirs", p. 65.
  - 7 I discuss some of the philosophical implications of Kojève's translation-commentary in Mariana Teixeira, "Kojève's « Dialectique du Maître et de l'Esclave »: Notes on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of a Traitorous Translation", *Verifiche: Rivista di scienze umane*, XLIX:1–2 (2020), pp. 159–175. We will return to this topic further on.
  - 8 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit Assembled by Raymond Queneau* (transl. J. H. Nichols, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980 [1947]), p. 29 (translation amended).
  - 9 Kojève, "Introduction to the Reading of Hegel", p. 7.
  - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 231 (translation amended).
  - 11 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
  - 12 Marcuse, Sartre, Hyppolite, and other prominent authors seem to take this influence for granted, especially regarding Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts* (Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, transl. J. O'Neill, New York: Harper & Row, 1969 [1955]: 29; Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954 [1941], p. 115; and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, transl. H. Barnes, New York: Washington Square Press, 1992 [1943], p. 321). Others, however, have argued against what they see as a misinterpretation and even a "myth" by pointing out that Marx does not allude, in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, to the famous *Phenomenology* passage, let alone give it a central place (cf. Chris Arthur, "Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic and a Myth of Marxology", *New Left Review*, 142 (1983), pp. 67–75; and David McLellan, *Marx before Marxism*, London: MacMillan, 1970, p. 197).
  - 13 Besides the obvious theoretical convergence, it also draws one's attention that Kojève used a quote from Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts* as the epigraph for his 1939 translation of the lordship–bondage passage.
  - 14 It is also present in the philosophical essay *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) as well as in her first novel, *She Came to Stay* (1943), which in fact features as its epigraph a quote from Hegel's lordship–bondage passage ("Each consciousness aims at the death of the other").
  - 15 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (transl. C. Borde, S. Malovany-Chevallier, New York: Vintage Books, 2011 [1949]), p. 18.
  - 16 Beauvoir, "The Second Sex", p. 17.
  - 17 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
  - 18 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
  - 19 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
  - 20 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
  - 21 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
  - 22 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

- 23 Kojève, "Introduction", p. 231.
- 24 Beauvoir, "The Second Sex", p. 66.
- 25 Ibid., p. 506.
- 26 Ibid., p. 848, my emphasis.
- 27 Ibid., p. 838.
- 28 Ibid., p. 861. I have inquired into Beauvoir's view of this ambiguity between immanence and transcendence in Mariana Teixeira, "Sex, Gender, and Ambiguity: Beauvoir on the Dilaceration of Lived Experience", in M. Hartmann & A. Särkelä (eds.), *Naturalism and Social Philosophy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021, forthcoming).
- 29 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (transl. B. Frechtman, New York: Citadel Press, 1976 [1947]), p. 156.
- 30 Beauvoir, "The Second Sex", p. 862.
- 31 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (transl. R. Philcox, New York: Grove, 2008), p. 192.
- 32 Fanon, "Black Skin, White Masks", p. 193.
- 33 Ibid., p. 180.
- 34 Ibid., p. 194.
- 35 Ibid., p. 194.
- 36 Ibid., p. 197.
- 37 Ibid., p. 196.
- 38 Ibid., p. 199.
- 39 Ibid., p. 196.
- 40 Ibid., p. 195, footnote 10.
- 41 Ibid., p. 168.
- 42 Ibid., p. 195.
- 43 Ibid., p. 168.
- 44 Fanon's approach in *Black Skin, White Masks* refers explicitly to the situation of Black Frenchmen, like himself, who share (at least formally) the status of citizen with his White fellow countrymen. He addresses the distinct situation of Black people living in regions under colonial rule in books like *The Wretched of the Earth* and *A Dying Colonialism* (originally titled *L'An V de la Révolution Algérienne*). Remarkably, in these later works struggle and violence take on a renewed and much more central role in the process of national liberation.
- 45 Fanon, "Black Skin, White Masks", p. 206.
- 46 A notable criticism takes issue with the very *intersubjectivity* that underlies this view. Against the "strong consensus concerning the intersubjective importance of Hegel's theory of recognition" (Sasa Josifovic, "The Dialectics of Normative Attitudes in Hegel's Lordship and Bondage", in Christian Krijnen (ed.), *Recognition: German Idealism as an Ongoing Challenge*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014, p. 268), some authors have insisted on situating this theory more strictly in a *pre-social* moment of the *Phenomenology*. The relation between lordship and bondage is taken here as an *intra-subjective* relation (e.g., Paul Cobben, "Recognition and Intersubjectivity in Hegel's Philosophy", *Metodo*, 5:1, 2017, pp. 17–44; J. McDowell, "The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of 'Lordship and Bondage' in Hegel's *Phenomenology*", *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 24:1–2, 2003, pp. 1–16; and Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, "Selbstbildung und Selbstunterdrückung. Zur Bedeutung der Passagen über Herrschaft und Knechtschaft in Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes", *Dialektik: Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie*, 2004/1, pp. 49–68). While frontally disagreeing with Kojève's conflictual reading of the lordship–bondage passage, the reconciliatory view that will be addressed in this chapter shares with it nonetheless



the basic premise that Hegel's treatment of recognition in this context is, or can be, appropriate to talk about relationships between persons, subjects, or individuals (and even between groups of persons).

- 47 Cf. Nicholas Germana, "Revisiting 'Hegel and Haiti': Postcolonial Readings of the Lord-Bondsman Dialectic", in M. Monahan (ed.), *Creolizing Hegel* (London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017, pp. 95–111); Richard A. Lynch, "Mutual Recognition and the Dialectic of Master and Slave: Reading Hegel against Kojève", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 41:1 (2001), pp. 33–41; and Michael Monahan, "Recognition Beyond Struggle: On a Liberatory Account of Hegelian Recognition", *Social Theory and Practice*, 32:3 (2006), pp. 389–414.
- 48 Monahan, "Recognition Beyond Struggle", *passim*.
- 49 Except for the first sentence of § 178: "Self-consciousness is *in* and *for itself* while and as a result of its being in and for itself for an other; i.e., it is only as a recognized being" (PS § 178).
- 50 Lynch, "Mutual Recognition and the Dialectic of Master and Slave", p. 34.
- 51 Germana, "Revisiting 'Hegel and Haiti'", p. 109.
- 52 Lynch, "Mutual Recognition and the Dialectic of Master and Slave", p. 34.
- 53 Germana, "Revisiting 'Hegel and Haiti'", p. 107.
- 54 *ibid.*, p. 102.
- 55 Monahan, "Recognition Beyond Struggle", p. 401.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 400.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 408.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 404.
- 59 To the extent that it prescinds from the struggle for recognition altogether, Monahan's approach would be better characterized as a *harmonic* rather than a *reconciliatory* reading.
- 60 Germana, "Revisiting 'Hegel and Haiti'", p. 110 (endnote 10).
- 61 Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000 [1946]), p. 12.
- 62 Joseph Gauvin argues that only the phrase *für uns* ("for us"), instead of every appearance of the term *wir* ("we") and its derivatives (*unser*, "our", or *uns*, "us"), denotes the narrative from the viewpoint of the philosophical consciousness. Cf. Joseph Gauvin, "Le 'für uns' dans la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit", *Archives de Philosophie*, 33, 1970, pp. 829–854.
- 63 This leads to the fascinating discussion about "Who is meant by 'we'?", as Heidegger put it (Martin Heidegger, *Hegel's Concept of Experience*, transl. K. R. Dove, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989 [1950], p. 126). In addition to Gauvin, cf. also Kenley R. Dove, "Hegel's Phenomenological Method", *Review of Metaphysics*, 23 (1970), pp. 615–641; T. M. Giladi, *Sur le 'Pour nous' dans La phénoménologie de l'esprit. Étude de cas: La conscience de soi* (Paris: Université Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2015); Marcos Lutz Müller, "A experiência, caminho para a verdade? O conceito de experiência na *Fenomenologia do espírito* de Hegel", *Revista Brasileira de Filosofia*, XVII:66 (1967), pp. 146–169; Marcos Nobre, *Como nasce o novo* (São Paulo: Todavia, 2018); and David Parry, *Hegel's Phenomenology of the "We"* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988).
- 64 Cf. W. Scott Cameron, "The Genesis and Justification of Feminist Standpoint Theory in Hegel and Lukács", *Dialogue and Universalism*, 3–4 (2005), pp. 19–41, Nadine Changfoot, "Feminist Standpoint Theory, Hegel and the Dialectical Self: Shifting the Foundations", *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 30:4 (2004), pp. 477–502; Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is 'Strong Objectivity'?" in L. Alcoff & E. Potter (eds.), *Feminist Epistemologies* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 53–54.

65 Cf. Hegel's remarks in the book's preface (PS § 39).

66 Lynch, "Mutual Recognition and the Dialectic of Master and Slave", p. 47. At the end of his paper (p. 48), however, Lynch reaffirms the superiority of the reconciliatory approach with respect to the agonistic approach, instead of favoring a framework focused both on *struggle and recognition*.

## 5 McDowell's Rejection of Recognition-Based Readings of Hegel in Chapter 4 of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

*Paul Redding*

In 1994, two books appeared that would come to be widely discussed in circles of analytic philosophy over the next decades but that would also capture the attention of Hegel interpreters—*Mind and World*, by John McDowell,<sup>1</sup> and *Making It Explicit*, by Robert Brandom.<sup>2</sup> Both had taken up a seemingly off-hand suggestion made by the American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars in a work from the 1950s, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*,<sup>3</sup> in which he alluded to that work as his “incipient *Meditations Hegeliennes*”.<sup>4</sup>

This was not the first time that Sellars's work in analytic philosophy had been linked to Hegel. Willem deVries had published a Sellars-influenced interpretation of Hegel on cognition,<sup>5</sup> and the “post-Kantian” Hegel interpreters Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard had both referred to Sellars, either directly or indirectly, in the course of their own writings on Hegel.<sup>6</sup> But the books by McDowell and Brandom were primarily addressing problems inherent in 20th-century analytic philosophy *itself*, with the enticing hint that Hegel might offer a way out of them from considerations internal to analytic philosophy.

In *Mind and World*, McDowell had suggested how Sellarsian and Hegelian ideas converged so as to point a way beyond problems in analytic philosophy around issues of perception and knowledge. Despite the casual description of his approach as Hegelian, Sellars's way beyond these problems had been largely Kantian, and McDowell understood this Kantian path as requiring a form of expression closer to that found in Hegel. It was in respect to this that his approach came into the general vicinity of those of the “post-Kantians”, especially the work of Pippin, who had focused on the continuity between Hegel's concept of spirit (*Geist*) and Kant's “transcendental unity of apperception”.<sup>7</sup> While what McDowell had actually written about Hegel in *Mind and World* had been sketchy, within a decade he had started to engage with specific parts of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* with two linked essays being published in 2003: “Hegel's Idealism as Radicalization of Kant”<sup>8</sup> and “The Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self: Towards a Heterodox Reading of ‘Lordship and Bondage’ in Hegel's *Phenomenology*”.<sup>9</sup> Here my focus is restricted to a controversial claim made in the latter essay.

One aspect of the second of these papers would sharply contrast his approach to that of many recent Hegel scholars in that McDowell did *not* endorse a widespread interpretation of the much written-about episode from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*—the section on “Lordship and Bondage” (or the “master–slave dialectic”) found in its chapter 4. Interest in these passages had first been stimulated by a series of lectures in Paris in the 1930s given by Alexandre Kojève. According to Kojève, Hegel had, in a way somewhat like Hobbes, accounted for the origination of human society by appealing to a mythic “struggle to the death”, but rather than motivated by a desire for the needs of *life*, his was motivated by a human-specific “desire for *recognition* [*Anerkennung*]” that would be resolved when one protagonist submitted to the other, “recognizing” his victor as his “lord”. This unilateral recognitive arrangement, however, was bound to fail because, according to Kojève’s Hegel, the relation of recognition was inherently *reciprocal*. Moreover, Kojève’s treatment of recognition was just one of a variety of approaches that had circulated in the second half of the twentieth century which, despite their differences, took the general lesson of Chapter 4 as that of reciprocal recognition being a precondition to the very existence of humans as “rational animals”, beings with the type of “mindedness” or “intentionality” characteristic of them. However, McDowell rejected the idea that such an account could be found in the actual text. In this chapter, I argue that, while erroneous, McDowell’s dismissal contains certain truths that contrast with the errors common to the rival “orthodoxy”.

### 5.1 McDowell’s Rejection of the Role of Intersubjective Recognition in Chapter 4 of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

The picture of Hegel found in Kojève’s lectures<sup>10</sup> mixed themes from Hegel with ideas from both Heidegger and Marx and had often been criticised by Hegel interpreters. Since his *Hegel’s Idealism*, Pippin had been critical of the type of Kojèvean reading of the recognition thesis that interprets Hegel’s idealism as a type of social theory of philosophical anthropology.<sup>11</sup> Considered as a systematic reading of Hegel’s text, Kojève’s had largely ignored the question of the connection of the recognitive theme to the topics discussed in the earlier three chapters of the text making up the section “Consciousness”. Hegel’s text, after all, was meant to trace the progress of a series of determinate “shapes of consciousness”, a progress via a self-correcting dynamic in which each shape could be seen to collapse due to internally generated contradictions, to be replaced by a subsequent shape that resolved the problems of its antecedent. This process was iterated until a conclusion was reached—a state of “absolute knowing”. Understood in this way, the “self-consciousness” made explicit in Chapter 4 should be read as offering a solution to the problems besetting the various shapes of “consciousness” of the preceding chapters, but, as Pippin indicated, Kojève

and others “write as if we should isolate the Self-Consciousness chapter as a free-standing philosophical anthropology, a theory of the inherently violent and class-driven nature of human sociality”.<sup>12</sup>

But by the time of McDowell’s essay, besides the approaches of Pippin and Pinkard, there had appeared a variety of other ways in which interpreters had discussed the centrality of the role of recognition in the *Phenomenology* and addressed questions of how it may or may not have fitted with Hegel’s broader project of the *Phenomenology* itself as well as his later more *systematic* concerns.<sup>13</sup> What exactly, then, was the basis of McDowell’s rejection of this notion that had played such a role in the post-war rejuvenation of Hegel’s philosophy?

McDowell turns to the *Phenomenology*’s Chapter 4, in section 5 of “The Apperceptive I”, in which he quotes Hegel’s characterization of the transition from Consciousness to Self-Consciousness as entering “the homeland of truth”, glossing this in Kantian terms as our having “begun to see how to understand knowledge in terms of the unifying powers of apperceptive spontaneity”.<sup>14</sup> However, he notes, the chapter itself, with its famed “Lordship and Bondsman” section can seem mysterious:

How is someone’s balking at a struggle to the death and submitting to enslavement by someone else related to the *Aufhebung* of otherness between consciousness and its object, the balance between subjective and objective that Kant aimed at but failed to achieve?<sup>15</sup>

It is here that he raises his objections to the style of commentary that “seems unconcerned with such questions” and, in particular, those stressing the theme of intersubjective recognition as a *condition* of self-consciousness:

To me the text there does not seem to say what these commentators would like it to, that recognition by an unrespected inferior cannot validate a superior’s self-certainty.... At any rate I find it hard to read that thought into Hegel’s play with the mismatch between the master’s self-certainty and the servile consciousness as the truth of that certainty (§192). But anyway, even if that is the point, how does it advance us towards Reason’s certainty of being all reality, the *Aufhebung* of otherness between subjective and objective that is the culmination of this chapter (§230)?<sup>16</sup>

To understand his perception of the mismatch between the theme of the recognitive-condition of self-consciousness and the overall trajectory of the text itself we need to go back to his Kantian way of expressing the very project of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. It is worth quoting in full the succinct presentation of the project of the *Phenomenology* with which he begins.

Hegel's *Phenomenology* traces an education of consciousness, as a result of which it is to attain the standpoint of absolute knowing. For consciousness (as such), its object is other than itself. The goal is for this otherness to be *aufgehoben*—cancelled as the simple otherness it at first appears to be, though preserved at a higher level, as a “moment” in a more comprehensive conception. Inquiry will then, in principle, be able to avoid a certain sort of philosophical anxiety. We shall no longer need to be troubled by the spectre of a gulf between subject and object, which is the pretext for a transcendental scepticism.<sup>17</sup>

One theme in particular introduced here will be worthy of our attention—McDowell's characterization of the standpoint of absolute knowing as a state in which *otherness* to the self has been *aufgehoben* in such a way to calm that “sort of philosophical anxiety ... troubled by the spectre of a gulf between subject and object”. This passage clearly aligns Hegel's goal with that of his own project in *Mind and World*. In particular, McDowell will repeatedly characterize Hegel's absolute knowing with a phrase he introduces in this essay but which neatly summarizes the goal of *Mind and World*—the attainment of an “equipoise” within consciousness between the subjective and the objective or, more simply, between mind and world—a stance in which the *otherness* of the world has been negated but, in a certain sense, retained as suggested by Hegel's term *Aufhebung*.

In *Mind and World*, McDowell's intention had been to liberate modern thought from the spectre of such a gulf by the use of a broadly Wittgensteinian deflationist strategy of “assembling reminders” of how we actually speak. “I find it helpful in this connection to reflect on a remark of Wittgenstein's: ‘When we say, and mean, that such-and-such is the case, we—and our meaning—do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: this—is—so’”.<sup>18</sup> And yet, Wittgenstein, he notes, had found this simple idea itself paradoxical. On the one hand, the idea that thought does not “stop anywhere short of the fact”, Wittgenstein had noted, “has the form of a truism”, but on the other,

in conjunction with the fact that “thought can be of what is not the case”, it can prompt a reaction in which our minds boggle over what seems a miraculous power of thinking in the most general sense, in this case meaning what one says, to “catch reality in its net”.<sup>19</sup>

A simple example is provided:

When one thinks truly, what one thinks is what is the case ... [a]ll the point comes to is that one can think, for instance, that spring has begun, and that very same thing, that spring has begun, can be the case.<sup>20</sup>

The suggestion is that it is only when we start from the idea of a type of thinking that we take to be *neutral* with respect to its *being* or *not*

*being the case*, and *then* ask the question of what distinguishes thoughts about what *is the case* from those about what is *not*, that we get ourselves into trouble. The very intelligibility of erring assumes that in normal situations one gets things right—a thought that cuts off the type of “hyperbolic doubt” central to Descartes’s method or the “transcendental scepticism” often attributed to Kant. There must be a *disjunction* separating the semantics of thought when it is *right* from when it is *wrong*.

McDowell had introduced Hegel at this point. To express the truism involved here in a philosophical mode, as when one says that “there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world”, is merely to dress up the truism “in high-flown language”. This is just how we should understand the “rhetoric” of Hegel’s “Absolute Idealism”, freeing it from metaphysically contentious ideas such as that of “renouncing the independence of reality”.<sup>21</sup> This truistic relation between mind and world can seem problematic when held together with the thought that our thoughts can be wrong. The possibility of error misleads us to thinking of a gap existing between our thoughts and what they are about, a gap we think needed in order to preserve the sense of the *independence* of reality from thought. From this starting point, we will then think of *true* thoughts as ones that have a form that corresponds to this independent reality. According to McDowell, however, Hegel rejects this “sideways-on” view of the relation of mind and world. His alternate view of the mind–world relation can seem contentious, but it will only be so if it is considered as oriented in one direction only, as going from mind to world. However, “we might just as well take the fact that the sort of thing one can think is the same as the sort of thing that can be the case the other way round”. This refusal to look for “a priority in either direction” is what I take the later metaphor of “equipose” to amount to.

Other than this, Hegel had little presence in *Mind and World*, the work being primarily devoted to assuring that it is *Kant* who “should still have a central place in our discussion of the way thought bears on reality”,<sup>22</sup> and it would be only after *Mind and World* that Hegel would come to have an increasing place alongside Kant in McDowell’s project. But the *philosophical* project had not changed. It still aimed to bring the reader to grasp their relation to the world in a way that, resting on nothing more than truisms, could not really be said to constitute anything like a “theory” at all.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, surely the type of philosophical anthropology favoured by some post-war Hegelians is a theory and a clearly contentious one at that. This is the basic spirit I take to be behind McDowell’s perception of the mismatch between the task of the *Phenomenology* and the more ambitious aims of diverse Hegelian theorists of “intersubjective recognition”.

Here, however, McDowell faced definite interpretative obstacles. In various oft-repeated passages, Hegel seems to straightforwardly assert the recognitive thesis, for example as in the descriptions that “self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness”

(PS §175) and that “a self-consciousness exists *for a self-consciousness*. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness” (PS §177) or that “self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (PS §178). McDowell's response here is really the only one available, treating such passages *figuratively* or as *allegory*. The opposed self-consciousnesses are allegorical representations of two aspects of the consciousness of a single individual, aspects Kant had distinguished as “empirical consciousness” and “apperceptive consciousness”.

It is obvious that there is a definite “figurative” dimension to Hegel's presentation of the “life-and-death” struggle and the subsequent relation of lord and bondsman throughout Chapter 4, his somewhat mythical account standing in a long line of similar accounts found in the tradition of modern political philosophy. But that the sentences quoted earlier from §§ 175 to 178 call out for figurative interpretation is by far from obvious, and short of a motivation for figurative interpretation, surely literal interpretation is to be assumed. Moreover, McDowell's figurative rendering of Hegel's sentences needed to extend further, such as to his invocation of *desire* in his account of the genesis of the life and death struggle:

We understand what Hegel means by introducing desire only to the extent that we understand those schematic descriptions of the movement of self-consciousness. ‘Desire *überhaupt*’ functions as a figure for the general idea of negating otherness by appropriating or consuming, incorporating into itself, what at first figures as merely other.

And so while *others* have taken Hegel to be extending the idea of consciousness here from a *contemplative* towards a more *practical* model, McDowell responds that “there is no suggestion here as anything as specific as a model of consciousness that has objects in view only in so far as they can be seen as conducive or obstructive to its purposes”.<sup>24</sup>

Given the lack of an obvious need to de-literalize Hegel's *general* claims about desire and recognition, McDowell's argument for his figurative interpretation can only be that it does not fit with Hegel's project *as he understands it*. Clearly, the reader has the option of responding, “so much the worst for McDowell's understanding of Hegel's project”. Nevertheless, McDowell's reconstruction of the links between Chapters 1 to 3, and Chapter 4 is as careful and illuminating as any found in the literature. To sharpen what is specific about McDowell's reading of Chapter 4, I want to compare it to the version offered by Pippin in his response to McDowell's paper in the volume *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>25</sup> Like McDowell, Pippin is critical of many extant “recognitive” readings of the *Phenomenology's* Chapter 4 but nevertheless endorses the literalness of its major claims



about the cognitive conditions of self-consciousness. Prior to that, however, it is worth reminding ourselves of the path that led through the three chapters on consciousness to Chapter 4.

As McDowell points out, the shape of consciousness from which the stance of *self-consciousness* starts out in Chapter 4 had been achieved at the end of the final chapter on *consciousness*, the concerns of which are clearly stated in its title “Force and the Understanding: Appearance and the Supersensible World”. Chapter 1 had started with the specification of a certain “shape of consciousness”—that of *sense-certainty* which, as the name suggests, takes something which is immediately presented in sensation as knowable with certainty. Here Sellarsians (or fellow travellers, such as myself<sup>26</sup>) typically have identified Hegel’s demonstration of the conceptual incoherencies involved in the idea of something sensuously given in *immediate* fashion and so *without* the “mediations” introduced by concepts, as akin to Sellars’s critique of “Myth of the Given” in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. But Hegel’s account is not presented in argumentative form but “phenomenologically”, in that we readers, the “phenomenological we”, are meant to simply *watch* the attempts of a protagonist *consciousness* to apply a series of implicit standards for what is *true* in experience in the course of experience itself. We are meant to appreciate how each such standard collapses under its internal incoherencies to be replaced by a successor “shape” which provides solutions to the incoherencies of the former, only to encounter similar problems, the telos of this process being the “absolute knowing” in which the series ends.

The second chapter, “Perception: or The Thing and Deception”, had concerned a generally commonsensical shape of consciousness, with an everyday sense of the fallibility and correctability of perceptual experience that had emerged as that which defeated sense-certainty. We might think of Descartes’s tower that, from afar, seems rectangular but, on closer inspection, is round. But this sense of fallibility and correctability is heightened with “the understanding” of Chapter 3, which is identifiably closer to a type of modern scientific “explanatory” consciousness. Its more radical sense of correctability is illustrated by its prototypical “object”, “force” (*Kraft*). Here Hegel clearly has in mind the sort of totalizing approach of the modern scientific outlook that posits or conjectures some underlying forces—not *themselves* immediately perceptible—that an explanatory consciousness might invoke in accounting for the episodes of experiential life, a “play of forces” somehow underlying and *explaining* appearance. Such a force is thus far from the type of perceivable everyday entity like Descartes’s tower *rightly seen*.<sup>27</sup>

From “our” perspective we readers come to grasp the fact that the explanatory posits of this shape of consciousness are products of its own active positing—“consciousness is thus *self-consciousness*.... The Understanding’s ‘explanation’ is primarily only the description of what self-consciousness is”. In its explanations, the protagonist consciousness

is essentially “communing directly with itself; although it seems to be busy with something else” (PS §163).<sup>28</sup> The *self-consciousness* that appears in this way in Chapter 3 becomes explicit in Chapter 4, but this self-consciousness should not be thought of as any type of consciousness concerned *simply* with itself—some type of inward-looking self-inspection favoured by Descartes in his *Meditations*. As McDowell stresses, empirically knowable reality “does not just disappear with the advent of self-consciousness.... The otherness of the object of consciousness must be *aufgehoben*, not simply obliterated”. Thus, now “self-consciousness ‘has a doubled object’, or an object with two moments”,<sup>29</sup> the purported world and itself.

McDowell focuses on one of Hegel’s characterizations of the first moment—it is “the whole expanse of the sensible world” (PS§167). The phrase “whole expanse” is crucial here, as it signals how the explanatory consciousness of the understanding, of which *self-consciousness* was shown to be the truth, had been a type of *global* consciousness, aimed at explaining *the world as such*. That is, the *whole* “expanse of the sensible world” is effectively the original *explanandum* which, now as a moment of self-consciousness, cannot simply disappear, as that would leave nothing *to be* explained.<sup>30</sup> Remember that *we* (*phenomenological* readers) can see how the explanatory posits of our protagonist consciousness (now shaped as *self-consciousness*) generates this world, but our protagonist whose activity we are observing has not yet achieved this insight. It regards “the whole expanse of the sensible world” (the first aspect of its doubled object) as a realm *opposed to* itself and as, McDowell puts it, quoting Hegel, “marked with the *character of the negative*”. The *negativity* of this first moment of the doubled aspect of self-consciousness indicates its *otherness* to the individual self-consciousness, but as McDowell quotes Hegel, “[s]elf-consciousness presents itself here as the movement wherein this opposition is *aufgehoben* and the identity of itself with itself gets to be [explicit] for it” (PS §176).<sup>31</sup>

With this, the general McDowellian shape being attributed to Hegel should start to become clear. Effectively, the conceptions of consciousness through which Hegel had progressed in the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology* just were variants of the problematic philosophical consciousness which McDowell had contested in *Mind and World*—a form represented there as the radical antithesis of mind and world as found in what he describes there as the “bald naturalism” (or, using Sellars’s description, the “scientific image”) characterising much of contemporary analytic philosophy. The position of the modern philosophical naturalist is akin to that of Hegel’s protagonist consciousness at the outset of Chapter 4, it is we phenomenological observers who have learnt that the *truth* of this position is that effectively that of *Kant*, to whom McDowell had returned in *Mind and World*. But despite Kant’s having correctly grasped this, there were, according to McDowell, residual problems with Kant’s way of presenting this leading to the appearance

of a transcendental scepticism—problems resolved by Hegel’s “absolute knowing” understood as the *equipoise* between mind and world.

We are at this point still upstream of the lord and bondsman episode, and so far, it is not clear as to whether it could be relevant or not to the continuing trajectory of Hegel’s presentation. Remember, that McDowell had simply stated that “much commentary” does not present the theme of recognition explicitly from the point of view of being an organic part of the resolution of the type of alienation of self-consciousness *from* its world that he, surely correctly, picks up as the central concern from which the chapter on self-consciousness starts. Let’s then briefly turn to an interpretation that, up to this point, is largely on-side with McDowell, but which accepts the literal status of Hegel’s claims about the role of desire and recognition as underlying conditions of self-consciousness—that of Robert Pippin.

## 5.2 Pippin’s Defence of the Role of Recognition in Chapter 4

From the time of *Hegel’s Idealism*, Pippin has been critical of the way that many other interpreters have appealed to the theme of recognition in Hegel, his criticism extending beyond the more “social theoretical” formulations of Kojève or Honneth to the tendency to treat it “as a comprehensive transcendental theory about self-awareness, as if about the possibility of *any* self-relation (as if the contents of any such self-relation are and must be internalizations of ways of being-regarded by others).<sup>32</sup> While “it is true that one can say that, according to Hegel, a certain form of social relation (recognizing and being-recognized) is a ‘condition’ for the possibility of true individuality”, this “should not be confused with questions of pre-reflexive self-familiarity, self-knowledge, existential uniqueness, personal identity and so forth” that had been pursued in various popular readings. And exactly what does “true individuality” amount to? Here the focal issue is *freedom*, the type of *free* subjectivity of the type prefigured by Kant and Fichte for which “recognition relations function in a complex way as conditions for that possibility”.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in response to McDowell’s interpretation, he writes that while it “has the very great virtue of preserving a connection with the first three chapters” and

while the general issue of the logic of the relation between independence and dependence is certainly applicable to the relation between spontaneous apperception and the passive empirical self.... McDowell’s interpretation, however rich in itself, fails to do justice to the radicality of what Hegel actually proposes.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to McDowell, the role of *desire* (*Begierde*) becomes central to Pippin’s account. But while not figurative in McDowell’s sense, in Pippin’s account Hegel’s “desire” does not mean exactly what it means in the mouths of others. When he claims that self-consciousness *is* “desire

überhaupt", according to Pippin, Hegel means it in a way that is "relevant to the question of the apperceptive nature of consciousness itself" and that "provides the basis for the claim that self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness".<sup>35</sup>

As he makes explicit, Pippin interprets Hegel's "desire" in a thoroughly Fichtean way. In Part III of the 1784–1785 *Wissenschaftslehre*, in which Fichte turned to reason in its *practical* sense, he had offered a strongly *actional* conception of the I as a "striving towards determination [*ein Streben zur Bestimmung*]", a type of "infinitely and indeterminately out-reaching activity of the I".<sup>36</sup> Pippin notes that Hegel similarly

treats self-consciousness as ... a practical *achievement* of some sort. Such a relation must be understood as the *result of an attempt*, never, as it certainly seems to be, as an immediate presence of the self to itself, and it often requires some sort of striving, even struggle (and all of this even in accounting for the self-conscious dimensions of ordinary perceptual experience).<sup>37</sup>

This formulation, he adds, "was closer to the way Fichte would put the point in his discussion not of *Begierde* or desire but of *Streben* or striving", noting that it is "somewhat surprising" that Hegel had called this whole process "desire".<sup>38</sup> This is the path to grasping how inter-subjective recognition can be brought in as a condition of self-consciousness. Hegel will argue that this type of desire can only find "satisfaction" in another self-consciousness, as is asserted in Chapter 4's §178. I want to focus on a prominent concept to which Pippin appeals in his account of the development of this *desiring-striving* conception of self-consciousness—the prototypically *Kantian* theme of "normativity".

That human intentional states are typified as "normative" reflects Kant's novel characterization of concepts as *rules* in a way that allows the assimilation of theoretical to practical cognition. As Pippin puts it, "judging, while not a practical action initiated by a decision, is nevertheless an *activity* sustained and resolved, sometimes in conditions of uncertainty, *by* a subject that means that it is normatively structured".<sup>39</sup> When Hegel writes that "consciousness is for itself its concept, and as a result it immediately goes beyond the restriction, and, since this restriction belongs to itself, it goes beyond itself too" (PS §80), Pippin adds that

he means to say that the normative standards and proprieties at play in human consciousness are ... *followed* by a subject ... his version of the Kantian principle that persons are subject to no law or norm other than ones they have subjected themselves to.<sup>40</sup>

A fundamental difference between Kant and Hegel, however, will be that while the judging subject for Kant was universal in a type of abstract way, for Hegel, it is so in a *concrete*—that is, social—way.

Hegel treats the project of human self-knowledge as essentially a matter of what he calls *Geist's* 'actuality', its historical and social development, and he seems to effect a shift in the proper subject matter of philosophy itself, insisting that philosophy must not study mere concepts, but concepts in their 'actuality', and that means in the *Phenomenology* in their historical actuality, when that actuality is considered in terms of this experiential 'test'.<sup>41</sup>

But while located in "life", Hegel demands differentiation of actions from mere animal responses to stimuli. Actions are made

on the basis of claims, commitments, entitlements, justifications, warrants, is the presence of another subject capable of challenging such a potential claimant. Only in the presence of such a challenge, goes the argument, does the subject's self-relation become normative, not a natural expression of animal desire.<sup>42</sup>

I do not want to disagree with the general shape of Pippin's counter to McDowell's reading of these issues: I find it conceptually compelling and faithful to Hegel's text. There is, nevertheless, a *sense* in which McDowell is, I believe, correct in his refusal to accept the interpretation that to others, including Pippin, seems obvious—that in Chapter 4, Hegel is putting forward his own radical theory of the grounding of human intentionality in social existence structured by relations of recognition. McDowell is wrong in that there is *no* theory or concept of recognition being introduced here in a way that transforms the conception of self-consciousness. There *is* one, but I want to suggest, it is not, for the most part, *Hegel's*. What is introduced is a theory or concept that supplies certain elements of what will *become* part of Hegel's own theory or concept (if that is the right term). But, the "theory of recognition" we get in Chapter 4 is, for the most part, and as Pippin effectively demonstrates, *Fichte's*—the "myth" of the struggle to the death and the mini society of lord and bondsman express the conception of recognition that Fichte had introduced in his work of 1796, *Foundations of Natural Right According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*.<sup>43</sup> It is only the most abstract and indeterminate generic formulations, as those found in §§ 175 to 178, that could be said to express *Hegel's* theory. Moreover, the more *specific instantiation* of recognition found there, I want to claim, are meant to show the *limitations* of Fichte's approach, his being a one-sided approach to be properly *aufgehoben* in the fuller, more concrete Hegelian presentation encountered later in the text.<sup>44</sup>

We will return to the broader significance that this has for McDowell's reading, but first I want to fill out more of this claim that I have so far simply asserted. Kojève's influential reading, I suggest, has blinded even critics, including Pippin, to Kojève's *own* conflation of Fichte's and Hegel's

accounts of recognition. Moreover, freeing Hegel's text from Kojève's legacy will help free it from another legacy that similarly distorts his message—that of *Sellars*.

### 5.3 The Properly Hegelian Fate of Fichte's Theory of Recognition in Chapter 4

The "*Wissenschaftslehre*" mentioned in the full title of Fichte's *Foundations of Natural Right* refers to the work published over the period 1794–1795, representing the first of Fichte's series of attempts to develop a 'Doctrine of Knowledge' based broadly on Kant's principles.<sup>45</sup> There Fichte had described his task as that of discovering the "primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human knowledge"—a principle to be found in an "*Act* which does not and cannot appear among the empirical states of our consciousness, but rather lies at the basis of all consciousness and alone makes it possible". Fichte's 'act', that of a self-positing, self-identical *I*, an '*I = I*', clearly signalled in the opening paragraphs of the *Phenomenology*'s Chapter 4 (PS §§ 166–167), plays the role of a dynamic analogue to Kant's more static notion of the "transcendental unity of apperception", a transcendental *self*-consciousness that conditions all acts of consciousness.<sup>46</sup> However, in his work on natural right this 'act' receives an intersubjective ground in reciprocal 'recognition'.

In *Foundations of Natural Right*, intersubjective mutual recognition is introduced to address the contradiction between the *I qua* instantiation of the *I = I*, and the limitations to which any actual *finite I* is subject by its being conditioned by an object or 'not-*I*'. Any *practical I* must think of the object of which it is conscious as simultaneously conditioning it but, as an object to be transformed by the will, as having no independent efficacy. The solution is to "think of the subjects' being-determined as its *being-determined to be self-determining*, i.e. as a summons [*eine Aufforderung*] to the subject, calling upon it to resolve to exercise its efficacy [*sich zu einer Wirksamkeit zu entschliessen*]"<sup>47</sup> The external factor limiting any subject is thus conceived, not as another object, *per se*, but as an *acting non-object* like itself—specifically as an act of 'summonsing' it to *act freely*:

[T]he rational being cannot posit itself as such, except in response to a summons calling upon it to act freely. But if there is such a summons, then the rational being must necessarily posit a rational being outside itself as the cause of the summons, and thus it must posit a rational being outside itself in general.<sup>48</sup>

The 'summons' is a demand to be recognized as a being with the right to act freely, and thus "*the finite rational being cannot assume the existence of other finite rational beings outside it without positing itself as*

*standing with those beings in a particular relation, called a relation of right [Rechtsverhältnis]*".<sup>49</sup> While in these early sections recognition and right are discussed in somewhat abstract terms, later recognition comes to be seen as made determinate in property rights:

As soon as the human being is posited as being in relation to others, his possession is rightful only if it is recognized by the other.... Only in this way does the possession become property.... All property is grounded in reciprocal recognition.<sup>50</sup>

The clearest analogue in Hegel to *Fichte's* theory as presented here is to be found in the account of "Abstract Right" in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, in which Hegel will repeat this treatment of property relations as grounded in the mutual recognition of rights. "Contract presupposes that the contracting parties *recognize* each other as persons and owners of property; and since it is a relationship of objective spirit, the moment of recognition is already contained and presupposed in it".<sup>51</sup> But while contract is a species of recognition, it does not exhaust the notion.

For Hegel, the sphere of organized social life *qua* realm of *Sittlichkeit* in which this operates, 'civil society' (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), provides a *mediated* realm of human recognitive relations that has, in modernity, been differentiated from the opposed sphere of *the family*, with each form of objective *Geist* based on and involving formally different and, in fact, *inverted*, recognitive relations.<sup>52</sup> Ancient societies, like those of the Greek polis, had not made this type of differentiation that has, in the differentiated sphere of civil society, provided a place for the type of individual freedom found in modernity. But Hegel was, of course, critical of modern theories of the society as found in classical liberalism that presupposed that the mediated relations of civil society are simply *natural* to humankind. For Hegel, the properly constituted modern state must somehow integrate the immediacy found in family relations with the mediations of the civil realm. The one-sidedness of the recognitive relations of the modern civil sphere is thus reflected in the one-sidedness of *Fichte's* theory of recognition. Moreover, this is demonstrated in the *Phenomenology* itself.

As one progresses through the text of the *Phenomenology* beyond Chapter 4, it eventually changes course. While it had started off in the first four chapters tracking shapes of individual consciousness and self-consciousness to reach the generic notion of recognition presented in its *Fichtean* instantiation, by Chapter 6, this has come to be replaced by a tracking of distinct, institutionalized instantiations of relations of mutual recognition, "objective shapes" of spirit, which form the historically varying ground within which particular forms of consciousnesses/self-consciousnesses can be located. In short, it has transitioned from a phenomenology of consciousness to one of *spirit*. Moreover, at the end of

Chapter 6, we encounter the most explicitly developed Hegelian species of the general notion of recognition that leads into Chapter 7, "Religion" that, together with the concluding Chapter 8, "Absolute Knowing", concerns the domain of "absolute spirit"—that is, the realms of art, religion, and philosophy.

What is significant for us is that the proto-religious species of the genus of recognition grows out of the failure of *moral* self-consciousness and, specifically, the type of Fichtean configuration of morality—"Spirit that is certain of itself"—sketched in its final section "Conscience". Hegel's own path from the Kant-Fichte terrain of a legalistically articulated concept of *moral* recognition to his own version of a religious conception is *via* the problems besetting a form of self-conscious subjectivity he refers to as the "beautiful soul".

The beautiful soul embodies the type of self-certainty abstractly sketched in the opening sections of Chapter 4 and must learn that such certainty is illusory by being brought before a "harsh judge" capable of unmasking the dissimulation involved in the beautiful soul's profession of the goodness and universality of their will. This judge must have a heart *so hard* that the mere fact of an individual's having a natural aspect will be enough for its acts to be judged as essentially evil. This passage is clearly able to be read in McDowell's allegorical way such that an individual subject is internally divided—effectively Hegel's representation of the kind of moral anthropology found in Kant and Fichte.<sup>53</sup> In the allegory, this internally divided personality needs to experience catastrophic collapse, the only way out of which leading to the type of *reciprocal* confession and forgiveness between judge and judged: "The word of reconciliation", writes Hegel,

is the *objectively* existent Spirit, which beholds the pure knowledge of itself *qua* universal essence, in its opposite ... a reciprocal recognition (*ein gegenseitiges Anerkennen*) which is *absolute* Spirit.... The reconciling *Yea*, in which the two 'I's let go their antithetical *existence* is the *existence* of the 'I' which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical within itself ... it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge.<sup>54</sup>

(PS §670)

While Hegel does not emphasise the *term* *Anerkennen* in subsequent discussions of absolute Spirit, this formulation surely indicates that *its* shapes are similarly to be understood in this way.

One might expect then from the fact of those hints concerning reciprocal recognition in Chapter 4 together with its identification with the role of the divine in human life in religion's triumph over Kantian-Fichtean morality in Chapter 7 that it would be unlikely to disappear from view within philosophy itself.



#### 5.4 A Different Approach to Actuality in Hegel's Metaphysics: Findlay and "Actualist" Modal Metaphysics

Pippin has long been taken by critics to have over-assimilated Hegel to Kant and, in particular, to Kant's *epistemological* critique of metaphysical knowledge, thereby denying that Hegel *had* a metaphysics. In response, he has endeavoured to spell out the exact sense of 'metaphysics' of which he has taken Hegel to be critical and to specify what he takes Hegel's own metaphysics to consist of.<sup>55</sup> I believe that Pippin is right in this and yet want to bring into question the shape of the metaphysics he attributes to Hegel. I do this by contrasting some details of his approach with an earlier attempt to understand the Hegel–Kant relation in a broadly similar way by an influential Hegel interpreter from the mid-twentieth century, John N. Findlay.<sup>56</sup> What distinguishes them is their antithetical attitudes to the issue of Kantian normativity.

Like Pippin, Findlay had regarded Hegel as a broadly Kantian type of critic of "transcendent metaphysics". Of all the philosophers of the tradition, Hegel was the one "who above all others is most completely free from transcendent metaphysics".<sup>57</sup> However, Findlay was acutely critical of Kant's practical philosophy and the broader "*ethics of rule*" which it typified,<sup>58</sup> an approach "which sought to prescribe what it is proper for the individual to *do*, or bring about by his doing" to which he opposed his own *axiological* or *value-theoretic* approach concerned "with what it is proper and desirable for him to aim at, or wish for, or prefer".<sup>59</sup>

Elsewhere I have treated Findlay's construal of Hegel's metaphysics in terms of an "actualist" approach to modality within the framework of contemporary modal metaphysics—an approach which contrasts with its "possibilist" opponent.<sup>60</sup> Throughout his long career, Findlay had combined an interest in Hegel with interests in phenomenology and modal logic. In the early 1930s he had completed a PhD on the metaphysics of the "object theorist" Alexius Meinong, looking to Meinong's work as providing a framework for the understanding of intentional states but without Meinong's ontological commitment to *possible* (and even *impossible*) worlds. Although not a logician, Findlay maintained a deep interest in twentieth-century logic and especially modal logic, and he took Hegel's logic as relevant to developments in "non-classical" logics developed after Frege and Russell.<sup>61</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, his former student, Arthur Prior, would go on to develop modern "tense logic"—now regarded as a variety of modal logic, a discipline that had laid relatively dormant in the first half of the century but which would undergo a renewal in the middle of the century with the development of "possible-world semantics".

Prior would be an early critic of the way this approach was interpreted metaphysically by David Lewis, who regarded alternate possible worlds as just as *real* as the actual world in ways echoing Meinong.<sup>62</sup> The description "modal actualism" had been applied to Prior's own metaphysics, and

the term can be understood as apt for both Findlay himself and Hegel as Findlay understood him. From Lewis's point of view, the "actual world" is one of many possible worlds. It is *our* world, the one *we* happen to be in. Lewis's actualist opponent holds onto this "indexical" account of actuality but without extending the concept of reality *further* to include alternate non-actual possibilities. For the actualist, the actual world *is* the real world. But like Lewis, the actualist wants to maintain talk about non-actual possibilities as meaningful. Without alternate possible worlds, alternative possibilities *for* the actual world must thereby be accommodated somehow *within* it. One way of making sense of this idea is to think of non-actual possibilities as contents of the intentional attitudes of agents thinking and acting from within the actual world itself. And we *know* the actual world contains such agents because it contains *us*. This is what the indexical conception of actuality specifies.

Locating ourselves as intentional beings in the world in this way thus contests the type of raw *opposition* between mind and world that McDowell is keen to oppose and the actualist's reciprocity between us and our world perhaps echoes McDowell's idea of the "equipose" between mind and world. All these issues are, I believe, relevant to understanding the type of "absolute knowing" to which the phenomenology is headed and, given the type of self-correcting, self-re-interpreting progress that it has, must have a consequence for the notion of "recognition" as it appears in the *Phenomenology's* Chapter 4 and, furthermore, for the series of "shapes of consciousness" of Chapters 1 to 3.

Pippin treats the seemingly modal theme of spirit's *actualization* as central to the progress of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and the theme of actualization is pervasive in his recent work on Hegel's *Logic*.<sup>63</sup> In this he seeks to assimilate Aristotle's *energeia*, actuality as that which is actualized from potentiality (*dynamis*), along with the theme of the Kant/Fichte framework of normativity into Hegel's approach to actuality (*Wirklichkeit*). We cannot pursue these complex issues here, but I do want to suggest something of how these broadly modal concerns might start to look when viewed from a perspective more like that of Findlay's, with his wariness of the normative framework embraced by Pippin.

McDowell's reading of the *Phenomenology* as on a path to the realization of "absolute knowing" conceived in terms of his own conception of an equipose between subjectivity and objectivity, mind and world, focuses on the "truism" of there being no "gap" between subjective states and their objective contents to be filled by some mental representation. "When one thinks truly, what one thinks is what is the case". But this truism is, nevertheless, accompanied by the contrasting idea that thought "can be of what is not the case". McDowell "disjunctively" separates these two situations. The fact that we *can be* wrong in judgements based on perceptual states, together with the fact that when we are wrong our perceptions are clearly not *of* what they purport to be, should not deter

us from the idea that *when* they are correct, they, nevertheless, *are of* what they purport to be of. If I think that “spring has begun” and it *is the case* that spring has begun, there is a type of immediacy in the relation between the thought and the fact. But while this idea, I believe, resonates with specific features of Hegel’s logic, McDowell ties this “truism” to Kant’s notion of the transcendental unity of apperception, in which *objectivity* of content is linked to theme of the “unity” of the contents of one’s experiences and beliefs. Such considerations can lead a perceiver to *correct* in a typically “Copernican” manner what had otherwise *seemed* to be the case, as when a perceiver comes to grasp something about the contribution to the perception of the context under which it had occurred. In Sellars’s celebrated example, a tie salesman comes to learn that, due to changed lighting conditions in the shop, what he had been classifying as green ties are, when taken into the sunlight, seen to be actually *blue*.<sup>64</sup> The tie salesman *could have* come to think that changes of lighting *actually* changed the colour of the tie rather than merely changing its appearance, but *that* belief is not able to be easily knitted into (what Quine had called) his “web of beliefs”—Kant would say, not easily incorporated into the “transcendental unity of apperception”. McDowell’s own example, however, poses problems for easy assimilation into Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception and suggests a *different* approach—Hegel’s.

That an example such as “spring has begun” does not have the type of content suitable for such assimilation into the transcendental unity of apperception is signalled by the example given in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “Now is night” (PS §95)—a judgment whose truth or falsity will change over time. It had been Findlay’s interest in judgments of *this* type that had originally prompted Prior in his pursuit of tense logic,<sup>65</sup> and to the claim that *globally* such judgments were *irreducible* to their “objective” equivalents. Like Findlay, Prior would, while acknowledging that a single judgement like “spring has begun” might be rendered, say, as “spring began in mid-September in Sydney in 2019”—a statement whose truth or falsity is *not* dependent on *where* or *when* it is uttered, this cannot hold for the *totality* of a subject’s judgments. Kant himself has rejected such context-specific judgments precisely because they are ill-suited to stand in the transcendental unity of apperception, which suggests some type of timeless unity of logically *compatible* judgements.<sup>66</sup>

Such simple context-dependent judgements are given a place in Hegel’s subjective logic in *The Science of Logic* as “positive judgments of existence”, the obvious logical shortcomings of which are displayed by their *negative* equivalents, denials of the sort, “spring *hasn’t* begun”. This is the first step in a series of transformations of logical structure induced by the possibility of *negation*. In the first type of negation, a judgment like “the rose is red” is opposed to a contrary in which the rose is claimed to be *some other colour*. In a second, more radical type of negation, the negation (effectively “external” or “sentence” negation rather than the initial “predicate” negation)

applies to all the components of the judgement resulting in its contradictory. For example, the contradictory of "the rose is red" can accommodate the idea that what is denied includes the idea that the thing judged is *a rose*. But predictably, despite each form in this series being *aufgehoben* by its more logically complex succeeding form, such simple forms must also be regarded as having features *preserved* in those succeeding forms.<sup>67</sup>

In the complicated account of judgement found in Hegel's subjective logic, Kant's *dualism* of intuition and concept is effectively replaced with a dynamic *duality* of two basic inter-translatable judgement forms characterised in terms of the different conceptions of predication involved in each, predication as "inherence" and predication as "subsumption", with their own distinct types of negation (predicate and sentence negation, respectively). We cannot go into the details here of how these two basic forms correlate with context-dependent judgements and judgements conceived in the modern way as having contents with stable "truth-values"; nevertheless, one thing is clear. Like Findlay and Prior, Hegel does not regard the simpler context-dependent judgement types as being universally replaceable by judgements with stable truth-values, as demanded by Kant's transcendental unity of apperception as well as by the type of approach familiar in modern classical logic. This is exactly at the heart of the approach to logic he criticises as the logic of "the understanding (*der Verstand*)".

In conceiving of his two inter-translatable judgment forms, Hegel had employed a distinction between *two ways* of referring to individuals taken from the logic of his teacher at the Tübingen Seminary, Gottfried Ploucquet, but ultimately coming from Leibniz, a distinction broadly similar to that found in contemporary modal metaphysics between "rigid designators" and "definite descriptions".<sup>68</sup> The distinction is expressed in Hegel as that between the determinations of "singularity [*Einzelheit*]" and "particularity [*Besonderheit*]" and in relation to the logic of negation, Hegel, in his account of judgment in *The Science of Logic*, employs this distinction in a way that can be likened to the way Robert Stalnaker, a contemporary "actualist", employs the notion of a "witness" to distinguish between abstract assertions and those "singular propositions" that are about their specific concrete witnesses.<sup>69</sup> Very crudely, assertions true in the actual world require witnesses while those that are contingently *false* in the actual world (and, according to possible world semantics, count as true in alternate possible worlds) do not.<sup>70</sup> Hegel, with this distinction between two judgement types, covers the same sort of logical territory as does Kant with his *concept-intuition* distinction. Here it should be remembered that for Kant, one of the features associated with empirical intuitions had been modal, as when, in the "postulates of empirical thinking in general"<sup>71</sup> he appeals to *sensation, qua* content of empirical intuition, to mark off the *actual* from the merely possible, which consists of "whatever agrees with the formal of conditions of experience (in accordance with intuition and concepts)".<sup>72</sup>

I have suggested that freeing the *Phenomenology's* Chapter 4 from Kojève's legacy might help to free Chapters 1 to 3 from Sellars's legacy, by which I meant to suggest that when the issue of recognition comes to be interpreted in terms of the metaphysics that starts to unfold in the later chapters of the *Phenomenology*—Hegel's metaphysics of spirit understood in the specifically *modal* way as a form of *actualist* metaphysics—the apparently “epistemological” issues raised in Chapters 1 to 3 will start to appear in a different light. On a modal reading, any appeal to a “given” will be as a purported mark of actuality, and *Hegel's* critique of the “myth of the given” will be ultimately about how the modally rich actual world within which we are located—a world that is necessarily *our world*—is known to us through the conceptual resources of our thought. Hegel will thus attempt to bring Kant's *modal* intuition–concept distinction within the scope of conceptually articulated judgements, replacing the static concept–intuition dualism with a dynamic duality of judgement types. But this is quite different from the critique as seen from within the framework of modern epistemology, in which appeal to a given can be countered in the Davidsonian way to which McDowell alludes in *Mind and World*, with the idea that “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief”.<sup>73</sup> Davidson's suggestion invokes the idea of two belief contents standing in some type of formal inference, and this invokes in its wake the idea of our inability to escape from a web of beliefs *in relation to which* the world is “external”: the “transcendental scepticism” haunting Kant.

McDowell's wariness about Davidson's way of putting things together with the general purport of his *disjunctivism*, I suggest, points away from epistemology, as predominantly understood now, to a more basic concern that tends to slip through the epistemologist's net—a focus on what it is besides the coherence of our beliefs that make the object of those beliefs the actual world. Knowledge, when subject to the aspiration of taking in “the whole expanse of the sensible world”, is on an inevitable path away from the immediacy of experience, which is always tied to context and locality, to a conception of the world in its bridgeless “otherness” to the knower. Central to McDowell's opposition to his fellow Sellarsian Robert Brandom has been his insistence on not just *perception* but also a conception of perceptual *experience* that goes missing in both Davidson and Brandom. I have suggested that this idea can best be thought in relation to Hegel by refocussing the discussion in modal rather than epistemological ways.<sup>74</sup>

## Notes

- 1 McDowell, John H. (1994) *Mind and World*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 2 Brandom, Robert (1994) *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- 3 Sellars, Wilfrid (1997) *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, with an Introduction by Richard Rorty and a Study Guide by Robert Brandom, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. First published, 1958.
- 4 Sellars, "Empiricism and Mind", §20.
- 5 deVries, Willem A. (1988) *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- 6 Pinkard had done so most explicitly in relation to Hegel's logic (Pinkard, Terry (1979) "The Logic of Hegel's Logic", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 17: 417–435.), while Pippin had discussed Sellars in relation to Kant's conception of "spontaneity" and extended it to his own account of Hegel in Pippin, Robert B. (1989) *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ch. 2.
- 7 Pippin, "Hegel's Idealism".
- 8 Published first in Italian translation (McDowell, John H. (2003a) "L'idealismo di Hegel come radicalizzazione di Kant", in *Hegel Contemporaneo: La ricezione americana di Hegel a confronto con la tradizione europea*, eds. L. Ruggiu, and I. Testa, Milano: Edizione Guerini.) and republished in English in McDowell, John H. (2009) *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, as essay 4).
- 9 McDowell, John H. (2003b) "The apperceptive I and the empirical self: towards a heterodox reading of 'Lordship and Bondage'", *Hegel Bulletin*, 1–2: 1–16., republished in McDowell, "World in View" essay 8.
- 10 Kojève, Alexandre (1969) *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. J. H. Nichols, Jr, New York: Basic Books. First published 1947.
- 11 E.g., Pippin, "Hegel's Idealism", ch. 7.2 and p. 290, n19, and Pippin, Robert B. (2008) *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chapter 8.
- 12 Pippin, Robert B. (2011) *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 11.
- 13 For example, from a basis in the work of Jürgen Habermas in the 1960s, Honneth, Axel (1996) *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press had developed a broadly "critical-theoretical" approach, while Siep, Ludwig (1979) *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie: Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie des Geistes*, Freiburg: Alber Verlag and Wildt, Andreas (1982) *Autonomie und Anerkennung, Hegels Moralitätskritik im Lichte seiner Fichte Rezeption*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.), had developed the theme of recognition in the context of Hegel's practical philosophy considered especially in its relation to that of Fichte. In Anglophone Hegel interpretation, the recognition theme was made popular through the work of Williams, Robert R. (1992) *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other*, Albany: State University of New York Press.  
In Redding, Paul (1991) "Hermeneutic or Metaphysical Hegelianism? Kojève's Dilemma", *The Owl of Minerva*, 22: 175–189 and Redding, Paul (1996) *Hegel's Hermeneutics*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, I had developed a broadly hermeneutic interpretation critical of Kojève.
- 14 McDowell, "World in View", p. 153, internal quotation Hegel 1977, § 167. For consistency, I follow McDowell's use of the Miller translation, (Hegel, G. W. F. (1977) *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, with analysis of the text and foreword by J. N. Findlay, Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- 15 McDowell, "World in View", p. 154.
- 16 Ibid.

- 17 Ibid., p. 147.
- 18 McDowell, "Mind and World", p. 27; internal quote Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1951) *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1951, §95.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid, p. 27.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 27–28.
- 22 Ibid., p. 3.
- 23 Hence the common description of McDowell's position as a "quietism".
- 24 McDowell, "World in View", p. 156.
- 25 Cf. Pippin, "Hegel on Self-Consciousness".
- 26 Redding, Paul (2007) *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 27 To continue the Sellarsian analogy, we might think of "the understanding" as close to his "scientific image of man in the world" and contrasting with the more perception-like "manifest world".
- 28 Where McDowell modifies Miller's translation, I follow McDowell for clarity.
- 29 McDowell, "World in View", pp. 154–155.
- 30 However, something like this will be shown to be the fate awaiting this type of self-consciousness.
- 31 McDowell, "World in View", p. 155.
- 32 Pippin, "Hegel's Practical Philosophy", p. 185.
- 33 Ibid., 185–186.
- 34 Pippin "Hegel on Self-Consciousness", p. 14.
- 35 Ibid. 14.
- 36 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (1982) "Foundations of the Entire Science of Knowledge", in *The Science of Knowledge* [1794–5], ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 231 and 220.
- 37 Pippin, "Hegel on Self-Consciousness", p. 15.
- 38 Pippin captures this Fichtean dimension of desire with the idea of a subject's being subject of their desires not to their desires (Pippin, "Hegel on Self-Consciousness", p. 32.)
- 39 Pippin, "Hegel on Self-Consciousness", p. 8.
- 40 Ibid., p. 22.
- 41 Ibid., 2.
- 42 Ibid., p. 67.
- 43 Fichte, "Science of Knowledge 1794".
- 44 In an essay whose primary focus is more on the issue of *desire* in chapter 4 than that of recognition *per se*, Scott Jenkins argues for the "deep affinities between Hegel on self-consciousness and desire in the *Phenomenology* and Fichte's treatment of these topics in his applied philosophy during the Jena period, in particular in his *System of Ethics*" (Jenkins, Scott (2009) "Hegel's Concept of Desire", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 47: 103–130). However, Jenkins points out that he does "not mean to suggest that Hegel intended the early chapters of the *Phenomenology* as an appraisal of Fichte, or that he had in mind the particular passages from Fichte's works that I discuss" (ibid., 104). This is just what I mean to suggest.
- 45 Fichte, "Science of Knowledge 1794".
- 46 In §167, Hegel signals how Fichtean self-consciousness, despite being asserted as *movement*, will not ascribe to its other sufficient otherness to prevent it collapsing into itself as "the motionless tautology of: 'I am I'". That Fichtean self-consciousness ultimately fails to escape from the rigid formality of Kant's

transcendental I will be the lesson of the dialectic of the lord and bondsman. McDowell is right: the account of recognition developed in chapter 4 is insufficient to ground genuine self-consciousness.

- 47 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (2000) *Foundations of Natural Right According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, 1796, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, Cambridge: Cambridge, §3, section III.
- 48 Fichte, "Natural Right", §3, section V. "But if there is such a summons, then the rational being must necessarily posit a rational being outside itself as the cause of the summons, and thus it must posit a rational being outside itself in general" (Fichte, "Science of Knowledge 1794", p. 37).
- 49 Fichte, "Natural Right", §4.
- 50 Ibid., §12, section 7, 1.
- 51 Hegel, G. W. F. (1991) *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. §71, remark.
- 52 I have explored this more systematically in Redding, "Hegel's Hermeneutics", ch. 7.
- 53 Indeed McDowell alludes to just this type of pathology in his figurative reading of the protagonists of Chapter 4, but Pippin finds this suggestion as to a type of (in this context) "epistemic schizophrenia" puzzling: "Why would the 'antithesis' consciousness experiences between its apperceptive intelligence and its object-dependent sensibility prompt such a radical, even 'pathological' self-diremption?" (Pippin, "Hegel on Self-Consciousness", p. 48 and fn. 43).
- 54 This conception of recognition is foreign to Fichte's and seems to have no role in either Kant's or Fichte's moral anthropology, with their dismissal of the ritualistic dimensions of religion.
- 55 See, for example, Pippin, Robert B. (2018b) "Reading Hegel" and "On Idealism: Responses to Markus Gabriel, James Kreines, Christopher Yeomans, Purushottama Bilimoria, Gene Flenady, Lorenzo Sala, and Jonathan Shaheen", *Australasian Philosophical Review*, 2, 4: 365–382 and 440–457.
- 56 E.g., Findlay, J. N. (1955–1956) "Some Merits of Hegelianism: The Presidential Address", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, 56: 1–24 and Findlay, J. N. (1958) *Hegel: A Re-examination*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- 57 Findlay, "Some Merits", p. 7.
- 58 Thus, in the context of his own work on moral philosophy, Findlay had declared the need to "attempt something in the nature of a 'transcendental deduction' of our varying ethical slants of mind, without falling into the many muddled absurdities of Kant's mighty performance" (Findlay, J. N. (1961) *Values and Intentions: A Study in Value Intentions and Philosophy of Mind*, New York: Macmillan, p. 24).
- 59 Findlay, "Values and Intentions", p. 20. For the general Hegelian shape of this conception see Findlay, "Values and Intentions", pp. 24–25.
- 60 Redding, Paul (2017) "Findlay's Hegel: Idealism as Modal Actualism", *Critical Horizons*, 18: 359–377. Redding, Paul (2019) "Time and Modality in Hegel's Account of Judgment", in *The Act and Object of Judgment*, eds. Brian Ball and Christoph Schuringa, London: Routledge. Redding, Paul (2020) "Actualist versus Naturalist and Conceptual Realist Interpretations of Hegel's Metaphysics", *Hegel Bulletin*, 42: 19–38.
- 61 Findlay, "Some Merits".
- 62 Redding, "Findlay's Hegel".
- 63 Pippin, Robert B. (2018a) *The Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in The Science of Logic*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, chs. 2 and 3.
- 64 Sellars, "Empiricism and Mind", §14.



- 65 Prior, Arthur (1967) *Past, Present and Future*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 1.
- 66 In *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* for example, Kant had experimented with a distinction between “judgments of perception” and “judgments of experience”. The former which “hold only for us, i.e., for our subject” must be given “a relation to an object” such that the judgement “should also be valid at all times for us and for everyone else” (Kant, Immanuel (2004) *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics. With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Gary Hatfield, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. §18). Kant’s views here conform to the classical view that Findlay and Prior were contesting.
- 67 Redding, “Time and Modality”.
- 68 Ploucquet expressed this in terms of a difference between “exclusive” and “comprehensive” particularity. On some of the background see Redding, Paul (2018) “Hegel and McDowell on Perceptual Experience and Judgment”, in *McDowell and Hegel: Perceptual Experience, Thought and Action*, eds. Federico Sanguinetti and Andre J. Abath, Cham: Springer, §7.3.
- 69 Stalnaker, Robert (2012) *Mere Possibilities: Metaphysical Foundations of Modal Semantics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. I have expanded on this comparison elsewhere (Redding, “Interpretations of Hegel’s Metaphysics”). The notion of a “witness” is from the modern “intuitionistic” approach to mathematics and formal logic which itself has an idealist heritage.
- 70 For example, a true assertion employing a general description in subject position, as in “The husband of Hillary was once president”, to be meaningful stands in need of a singular proposition something like “*Bill* was once president” or “*that man* (pointing to Bill) was once president”.
- 71 Kant, Immanuel (1989) *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A218/B265–6.
- 72 McDowell has objected that I am being “massively uncharitable” to Kant in expressing the point in this way (McDowell, John (2018) “Responses”, in *McDowell and Hegel: Perceptual Experience, Thought and Action*, eds. Federico Sanguinetti and Andre J. Abath, Cham: Springer, p. 242); however, my concern is not directly with Kant as with Hegel. With his typical criticism of Kant as trapped in the logic of *der Verstand*, Hegel may be being uncharitable, but putting things in this way can be helpful for underlining what the important issues are for Hegel.
- 73 Davidson, Donald (1986) “A Coherentist Theory of Truth and Knowledge”, in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Ernest LePore, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p. 310, quoted by McDowell, “Mind and World”, p. 139.
- 74 I’m grateful to Robert Pippin for helpful feedback on an earlier version of this chapter. I’d like to thank also an anonymous reader for their careful scrutiny and criticism of the ideas expressed here.

## 6 Self-Consciousness and Alienation

### The Young Marx's Reception on Hegel's Master–Slave Dialectic

*Pablo Pulgar Moya*

According to Hegel, the conceptual formation of the *Logic* is the framework for the self-realization of the concept in different forms of real philosophical thought. At the same time, the *Phenomenology* is systematically presented as a deliberate exposition of the individual human spirit, but it is by no means a rough and erratic preliminary concept of *Logic* itself.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the *Phenomenology* and the philosophy of spirit reconstruct several concrete moments of the logical idea.<sup>2</sup> This “remodeling” of the logical idea offered by the philosophy of spirit finds an extensive treatment of the question of knowledge. We can thus emphasize, following Hegel's words from the second half of the *Phenomenology*'s introduction, that a phenomenology of spirit must be “undertaken” and defined as the “presentation of the knowledge that appears”.<sup>3</sup> Stricto sensu, the *Phenomenology* thus systematizes the immanent and a priori laws that govern phenomena such as the ego's processing of appearance that is limited in space and time. The *Phenomenology* promotes an orientation about the subject's knowledge in the form of a methodical exposition, concept-governed analysis. Marx reinterpreted this orientation in a particular way in his early writings and came to disagree with Hegel's organic-systematic mode of exposition. Given this context, the purpose of this article is twofold. We try to account for the Hegelian origin of some critical concepts that are found in the reception of the young Marx, which function as pillars for his construction of the socialization problem, and to this end, we establish a relation with the debate surrounding the critical reception of the already classical (and no less controversial) position of Kojève.

The task of this chapter is thus to provide a consistent presentation of Marx's (re)interpretation of Hegel's work regarding the connection between domination and bourgeois society. The corrective character of Marx's strong criticism is not taken to represent a doxographic correction of the *Phenomenology*'s program, but instead, Marx takes up some of elements from the *Phenomenology* as a preamble for his own systematics. The connection of Marx's early manuscripts with this work is undeniable for evaluating Marx's general ideas not only as a draft of a profoundly Hegelian correction of Hegel but also as an assimilation of some of its epistemological claims.

The (early) discussions of the modes of concrete and abstract domination in Marx outline epistemological corrections to the Hegelian phenomenological position. The importance of the *Phenomenology* to the young Marx is analysed above all with a view on the role played by the concept of “labour” [Arbeit], an element that is highlighted by Kojève.<sup>4</sup> Crucially, Marx’s link with Hegel’s works is not limited to a “lexicographical” task, as has been suggested by Schumpeter.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the young Marx uses Hegelian phenomenological determinations as a critical form of exposition of his own *materialistic exposition of human nature*. We want to show that Marx’s early concept of (abstract) domination (*Herrschaft*) shows a philosophical interpretation of the concepts of consciousness and of alienation from the point of view of a critical dialogue with Hegelian phenomenology.

## 6.1 Master–Slave Dialectic as Anthropology

### 6.1.1 Marx on Hegel’s *Phenomenology*

In the middle of the 20th century, the problem of the dialectic of Domination and Servitude, which Hegel had carefully examined, was taken up in relation to Marx’s philosophy. Marx himself illustrated some aspects of his early theory in terms of this dialectic and took it as a starting point for an emancipatory consideration of capital relations. This dialectic, formulated in the section on “self-consciousness” in the *Phenomenology*, remains important to many Hegel experts and, at the same time, to a considerable number of Marxist exegetes. In principle, the use of these dialectical figures (master and slave), on the one hand, resulted in an immeasurable overestimation or overinterpretation of the role of power relations in the Marxist debate; on the other hand, it entailed a (possible) misinterpretation of the thoughts of Hegel and Marx with regards to the problematization of consciousness.

The critical and self-verifying formation of self-consciousness attempts to objectify an epistemological problem according to Marx. In Marx’s dialectic of domination and servitude, this represents not only a problem of the Self but also one of—in Adorno’s words—socialization (*Vergesellschaftung*)<sup>6</sup>, whereby self-consciousness is unfailingly related to an Other. A defining feature of this dialectic in Marx’s perspective is the alienation of the other through a “struggle for recognition,” so this dialectic implies an asymmetric difference between two factors in the framework of human nature,<sup>7</sup> which is illustrated in the abstract domination of capital over labour<sup>8</sup>. The realization of the power of one (including the dominant owner) contributes to the powerlessness of the other (including the servile worker).<sup>9</sup> The struggle that forms these *social* consciousnesses exists on the side of the master due to the need for the other to recognize him as master. Along with this, according to the young Marx, a class

division is generally recognized through the *appropriation* (which forms a "domination of capital") of the reproduction of capital or of all the means of production.

In Hegel's words, the master is master of his consciousness or his being-for-itself, which "is mediated with himself through another consciousness."<sup>10</sup> The master becomes master when he controls an object *for itself*. However, his mastery refers to himself only in relation to the slave (= servile consciousness), who recognizes him or "must" recognize him as master or bearer of power with regards to the transformation of the autonomous object. This relationship of recognition between what is recognized and what it recognizes is clearly unilateral and asymmetrical, insofar as the satisfaction of one is produced by the dissatisfaction of the other. The slave has its worth as a means of the desire of the other or of achieving the will of the master and not for itself, that is, not as a self-consciousness that is determined by being-for-itself in the interests of satisfaction *on* the object, but by contrast, the slave is responsible for the activity (for Marx, = transformation of nature) *in* the object (= labour). Labour is understood as an "inhibited desire"<sup>11</sup> with which the slave is being objectified through his own force ("labour power" for Marx). Master and slave, both opposite determinations of the theory of consciousness, are related to the satisfaction of the object of desire (of the other), which contributes to the asymmetry in the struggle of consciousness for the recognition of the other. Hegel describes this by stating that self-consciousness and otherness exist in a *compositum*. The desire for the self-assertion of the ego can only take place in a mutual connection with an alien self-consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

With regards to the roles of master and slave, Marx understood that this Hegelian development of knowledge referred to a social terrain within a being's life that determines the central points of the moments of consciousness and not vice versa, in the sense of a the premise: "the mode of production of material life conditions the process of social, political and intellectual life in general."<sup>13</sup> Framed in the theory of a consciousness of dominance relations, which Hegel considers to be a process of knowledge, Marx reinterprets these relations not as relations of intentional content but as social property relations, as a *social-productive or historical-conceptual development of material life*. In other words, as an economic relationship of domination where the consciousness of the master is reflected in the property and the consciousness of the slave in labour.<sup>14</sup> The master, therefore, follows a social role that pursues his own (private) interests. The self-conscious slave also assumes a social role, namely to abolish social relations.<sup>15</sup> The relations of domination and property are reproduced through a process of accumulation of the means of production, which are means for the satisfaction of desire (*Begierde*). Under these conditions, the separating function of consumption and production grows: one produces what the other consumes.

The dissolution of the contradictions of class society leading to the overcoming of the economic-capitalist state of affairs necessarily begins with the creation of the structuring conditions of the dominant part of this social structure, here, the accumulating class.

Regarding this, Feuerbach has exemplified the central role of the Christian God that recognizes himself in his own work, as through his self-contemplation, he produces himself *immediately*. The created affirms the divinity of God through the affirmation of creation. The creator himself has to create the human being, slave, and prodigal son so that humans can cultivate his being-God and his being-father.<sup>16</sup> But Marx criticizes Feuerbach's abstract critique of religion. According to Adorno, the young Marx thus carries out the critical analysis of Hegel's dialectic of domination and servitude from an immanent argument that explains the genesis of modern society. The dialectical figure of the "master," in an explicitly economic-philosophical way, requires a peculiar logic for the recognition of his dominion. This forces the master to pursue the satisfaction of his own greed without wasting his productive powers. His mastery/domination is a power of disposition over the *Other's* labour. This defines the cornerstone of modern production. The confirmation or recognition of this dispositional power reproduces the circulation of goods in which the goods wear out repeatedly. On the other hand, the figure of the "slave" appears in the same process of objectification of the subject as the subject of labour, as a transformer of nature,<sup>17</sup> for which the master is raised by the appropriation of nature and by the collision with a submissive, servile consciousness, based on the appropriation of the means of production of nature. That is to say, he also appropriates the objective of realizing other self-consciousnesses that have not yet cancelled his natural state.

According to the Adornian argument about the *mature* Marx, which is supported by authors such as Reichelt,<sup>18</sup> Backhaus,<sup>19</sup> Redolfi Riva,<sup>20</sup> or Bellofiore,<sup>21</sup> the human being appears in the exposition of political economy as a "tool" of bourgeois enrichment (= socialization) due to his labour-power, with which the realized object is objectified (= product; *vergegenständlicht*). Humans appear only as personifications, as representations of a commodity. However, this character of a human tool implies that one is always a tool for someone else. Thus, Heinrich and Bellofiore emphasize that the capitalist is determined by socialization, which represents a reproductive "alienation" from another *producing* subject.<sup>22</sup> Marx's determination of production in a capitalist society sees the worker as the tool to maximize the enjoyment of the master. The master wants to fulfil his wish. In his desire, accumulation is a purpose that continually determines his own self-realization. For producers of goods, their own desire depends on the enjoyment of the one who exercises command power (*Kommandogewalt*) over labour because the conditions for their minimal freedom and enjoyment are commanded by the mediation of the means of production.<sup>23</sup>

On Marx's view, the slave works for the master and not for himself: that is why it is understandable that the slave (the worker) has the opportunity to remove his submissive, servile state and the consciousness of his social state (of being *for-other*) in a critical way. In his self-alienation, he finds the nucleus for the transformation of his material conditions, which are governed by the division of labour.<sup>24</sup> The slave is forced to recognize the master as free (and at the same time as unfree). The worker, in the knowledge of his own exploitation, recognizes other subjects as alienated under such conditions. Contrary to Hegel's own exposition in the *Phenomenology*, for the young Marx, the consciousness of the conceptually unfolded anatomy of the capitalist social formation must also be understood as a social consciousness in the sense of a "critical anthropology".<sup>25</sup> It serves as a possible exemption from command power when the worker (= producer of commodity values) denies social regulations of production. He denies the social nature of the reproduction of the prevailing society, which seems to be given from an uncritical perspective. In this situation, the worker can no longer be considered a natural slave (*κατὰ φύσιν*<sup>26</sup>). The awareness of his (submissive) instrumentalization for someone else's enjoyment can trigger a movement that aims to destroy this condition.

Marx's early conception of the relations of domination and servitude is developed within the organic totality of critical social formation. The abstraction of capital as a compulsion of another's will on labour constitutes the idea that structures all explanations in 'Das Kapital'. The command power over labour is a real abstraction that allows for a practical interpretation of a "political" reading of Marx's critical presentation of the appearances.<sup>27</sup> Without Eric Weil's strong emphasis on designating materialism as a "translation" of idealism into materialism,<sup>28</sup> the greatest theoretical heritage of Hegelian thought in young Marx's conceptuality consists in the fact that phenomenology, in addition to purely abstract thought (as *Darstellung des erscheinenden Wissens*), also shows a transition from naturalness to historicity, whereby the concept of alienation is a result of his own interpretation of the master-slave dialectic in a practical sense.

### 6.1.2 Kojève's Approach to Hegel From Marx

Several times, Alexandre Kojève differentiated between an anthropological and a metaphysical interpretation of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*,<sup>29</sup> and therefore, chapter IV of the *Phenomenology* played for him a key role in the whole theoretical edifice. Kojève,<sup>30</sup> based on Koyré's interpretation of *Phenomenology* and Husserl's phenomenology, and Jean-Yves Calvez,<sup>31</sup> among others French Hegelians, have seen a possible approach to an anthropological interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* in the young Marx's theory of alienation, specifically related to the concept of labour and with direct references to figures of master and slave contained into *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. However, it is necessary to think about which

elements are reliable in Hegel's own theory on this dialectic and which elements correspond to a further reading of Marx in Kojève's interpretation. Marx recycles and rescues for his own early theory certain concepts from the "master-slave dialectic", *translating* in this way phenomenological criteria of self-consciousness into criteria of a practical theory. The anthropological reading of the early Marx of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, in which "human nature" is the centre of the whole analysis,<sup>32</sup> enables this kind of interpretation and was taken up by Kojève as a model for the construction of his own reading. The most notable difference between Marx and Kojève, however, lies in the fact that the former uses elements of the *Phenomenology* for his own construction of his theory of alienation, while the latter does so to carry out an exegesis of the whole of Hegel's *Phenomenology* as an "action theory".<sup>33</sup> Kojève's exegetical approach to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has been deemed attractive by a number of contemporary thinkers, thus opening new perspectives for the reading of a social interpretation of the Self,<sup>34</sup> but he has also drawn harsh criticism about the feasibility of translating figures of the self into anthropological figures, especially in relation to the concept of desire.

In order to clarify what this means, we must return to Hegel's account of the relationship between self-consciousness and desire in order to understand the problem of desire. The scientific dimension of the master-slave dialectic forms an interwoven dynamic that is represented in many ways in Hegel's language. In the course of exposing self-consciousness, the master is never freely recognized in isolation without considering an appreciative otherness towards him. The master indirectly controls the existence (*Dasein*) of the slave and imposes its apathy on it. The Hegelian metatheoretical exposition of desire and self-consciousness shows the dependence of the master on the object (the other); that is, he becomes the slave of his desire, the slave of an external object (*Gegenstand*). In this process, the master loses his ruling status and, therefore, must be recognized as master by someone external to him in order to regain his *mastery*.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this caveat and our concerns about this position, we can see that such an analysis can at least be accepted as a possible reading, especially since the interpretations of Hyppolite, Kojève, and, more recently, Axel Honneth<sup>36</sup> have significantly shaped the understanding of chapter IV of the *Phenomenology*. For Kojève, master and slave in Hegel's *Phenomenology* are figures that result in the conquest of autonomy through labour and its independence from object, as well as its formative, educational, and civilizing character. An immediate consequence of this modification and transformation of things and the world is its own creation, transformation, and realization, being the source of the progress of humanity. Indeed, for Kojève, the "spiritual" superiority of the master over the slave is concretized in the fact that the latter must work at the "service" (*Dienst*) of the former.<sup>37</sup> However, Marx argued in his first *Manuscripts* that the form of labour in modern society constitutes a total "alienation" of the human being.

This process presents an uneven, asymmetric reflection of the opposing consciousnesses, which, according to Kojève, can only be freely “harmonized” in reconciliation or mutual recognition.<sup>38</sup> The evident Fichtean influence on the theory of consciousness is the most significant task of phenomenological characterization of consciousness, according to which the freedom of the Self can only be understood as the liberation of the We.<sup>39</sup> Kojève’s anthropological version in terms of a “socialization” of speculative self-consciousness considers the external Other as part of self-determination. According to his (controversial) reading, only at this moment is the self liberated and recognized by the Other as free, but it errs in understanding the role of self-consciousness “as a free-standing philosophical anthropology”.<sup>40</sup>

Everything that emerges in Hegel’s theory of consciousness belongs to a previously problematized constellation of speculative moments, which is overlooked by Kojève, in accordance with commentators such as Gadamer,<sup>41</sup> Pippin,<sup>42</sup> Finelli,<sup>43</sup> or Houlgate.<sup>44</sup> After considering the first phase of the determination of consciousness, we must now return to this conception of the identity or reconciliation of opposing consciousnesses in Hegel itself. As stated earlier, for Hegel, the immediacy *posited* must be negated through self-consciousness. But the denial of simple consciousness can only be understood as an affirmation of self-consciousness. At the stage of our determining act, the need for a correction of phenomenological thinking may be indicated. Being *in itself* is only determined, thus, in the negating characterization of the *for-itself*. And being-other is reflected in being-me. The Self becomes conscious only through reconciliation with the object, in connection with being-other.<sup>45</sup> The same happens with the reconciliation of consciousnesses in the framework of the master–slave dialectic. The other self-consciousness is due to the abolition of individuality, and therefore, the identity of both conceptualities in their interaction arises as mastery and servitude. One of the two parts of the opposite consciousness prevailed over the other but only purely in itself. For Hegel, then, the individual experiences himself through the recognition of the other consciousness. The master (*Herr*) is always master compared to someone who is ruled (*beherrscht*) by him. In no case are they at the same level of self-determination.<sup>46</sup>

In this way, the double face of the dialectic can arise, according to which a struggle arises due to alienated labour. Kojève interprets this double task of the dialectics as the product of a struggle for recognition on the part of the Master in defence of his own animality, of his voracity for Other’s labour which Honneth will describe as always illusory and unsuccessful.<sup>47</sup>

But the Master fights like a man (for recognition) and consumes like an animal (without having worked). Such is his inhumanity. He thus remains a man of Begierde (which he succeeds in satisfying). He cannot go beyond this stage, because he is idle. He can die as a man, but he can only live as an animal!<sup>48</sup>



This exegetical language of Kojève reflects the consciousness of his mastery/domination and the asymmetry between being-recognized and the one-who-recognizes. The slave is the one who recognizes and realizes the master's *desire*.<sup>49</sup> In other words, he is *a means* and *tool* for his enjoyment. In this way, Lacanian psychoanalysis used "desire" as a polysemantic concept to philosophically justify a theory of consciousness. It is not possible to make a value judgment of this theoretical institution, which is based on Kojève's observations on the master–slave dialectic. With the "French" Hegel (especially Hyppolite, Kojève, Garaudy, and Lacan), there was a new psychological turn of the concepts in Hegel's theory of consciousness, based on a dialectic of desire. At the same time, these authors interpreted Marx's concept of alienation as an extrapolated result of the dialectical structure of master and slave. Our research in no way attempts to support such a psychologizing interpretation, but it should be noted that the concept of alienation and thus class-consciousness in the *Paris Manuscripts* (1844) refers critically to this dialectic.

The interpretations of the young Marx and Kojève differ radically in the sense that each tries to do their exegesis. The first does not attempt to give an interpretation of the *Phenomenology* itself but, rather to construct its own conceptuality from it while focusing on the dynamics of the abstract domination of capital over human labour, as an asymmetric relationship. This anthropological vision of Marx will undergo radical changes from the different formulations of his *Manuscripts* on the mode of socialization in the critique of political economy since 1860; the second attempts to sustain an anthropological derivation of the Hegelian method related to chapter IV that distorts the *Phenomenology* itself. In this sense, "it is not adequate to distinguish between an anthropological moment and a metaphysical moment in the *Phenomenology*, as Kojève does",<sup>50</sup> since it duplicates Hegel's own construction of his theory of consciousness, erring in the intention of the chapter itself.

## 6.2 Back to Marx: Relations of Domination Within Alienation (*Entfremdung*) in Marx's Early Thought

The main focus in Marx's early writings is the critical development of the cardinal elements for a critique of the dominant capitalist system's outline and a conceptual examination of the subsumptive character of capitalist labour, which continually reproduces contradictions *de re*. This criticism raises the question of the social-economic order and the genesis of its corresponding class differences, which arise due to the accumulation and appropriation of foreign labour-power. The young Marx's critical-systematic central idea points directly to political practice and, even more, to practice as a realization of the critical categories that result from the investigation and exposition of capitalist economic wealth in *Capital* and, in the young Marx, there is a decipherment of the conditions for a possible dissolution of the alienated

status of workers under capital domination. With the Hegel's dialectic of mastery and servitude discussed above, another practical-theoretical problem is shown, which thematizes the emergence of alienated humans in relation to other's labour. In the first notebook of the *Paris Manuscripts* and, even more clearly, in the so-called *Notes on James Mill*,<sup>51</sup> this "practical question" about alienated labour is central to the discussion of the human species with the "worker slave by nature" (*Naturknecht Arbeiter*).<sup>52</sup>

The rehabilitation of the concept of alienation is presented here as a key factor for understanding the role of the human in the critical presentation of a social understanding of Hegel's master-slave dialectic.<sup>53</sup> The understanding in the young Marx of *being*-alienated through the dominant *having* shows the intention of considering the human essence in political-economic conditions.<sup>54</sup> In Marx this alienation implies a dominant *principium individuationis*, according to which the master is personalized by the slave and the slave by the master.<sup>55</sup> The capitalist, as master under the rule of capital, dominates the labour of others for his own benefit. He has dispositional *power* over the labour *force*. For this reason, the worker, a slave under the mandate of labour, performs labour alienated for the domination of others.

The *anthropological* reading of the young Marx makes several critical references to the obvious interpretation of private property by (classical) economists. Heinrich is right on this point when he says: "Marx [in the *Paris Manuscripts*] endeavors to criticize economics in an *immanent* way".<sup>56</sup> The *phenomenological* interpretation of alienation, on the other hand, also played an important role in the development of Marx's critical presentation, of which *alienation* is an early result and provides epistemological elements for the structure of his economic critique. The servile status of modern workers, which Marx also calls alienation in the early writings, has a twofold character: on one hand, it is seen as a tool of capitalist interests, and on the other hand, it is a means for satisfying the "wishes" of the capitalist.<sup>57</sup> The worker in capitalism is objectified by selling his own labour-power to another subject, but this status, according to Marx, contains the elements for abolishing the servile consciousness. Since the latter conflicts with material conditions, the slave first denies his labour for the master *de ratio* and then *de facto*. Marx's idea of the contradictions of modern master-slave dialectic indicates that the critical presentation of socialization leads to the dissolution of capitalist contradictions. By becoming conscious of himself as a means of satisfying alien wishes, the slave can abolish his servile status quo. Through the attitude towards his own activity, that is his labour (*ἐργον*) as a slave, the master is denied as master, that is, his *lordly* condition, and thus the slave understands himself as master of his objectifying activity, that is, of his labour (*ἐνέργεια*). The concept of alienation thus contains an alienation of the human species under the development of private domination, that is, under the figure of private property.<sup>58</sup>

As Adorno emphasized, workers' alienation only occurs when a "self-preservation without Self" (*Selbsterhaltung ohne Selbst*)<sup>59</sup> becomes possible. Marx's early understanding of this selfish instrumentalization of the worker in the context of political economy as finalist labour for an *alien* essence shows that alienation must be understood as a specific immanent dimension of political economy. This theoretical task can be used to describe at least one theoretical-practical claim in Marx's early works, namely that the contradictions, normative and personal, of the asymmetrical domination of capital must be overcome.

The ethical and anthropological problems of Marx's theory worried classical European Marxists in the early 20th century, but they rarely delivered a plausible and concrete critique of it.<sup>60</sup> According to Marx, his own presentation of economic conditions and capitalist functionality would be a tool for the producer of goods, the worker, to free himself from the contradictions produced. For Michael Heinrich, the young Marx, with his "anthropological" concept of alienation, attempts to explain the contradictory dynamics of reproductive mechanisms and the immanent dependency relations of developing capitalism.<sup>61</sup> That is why he developed his first (significant) critical analysis of political economy to abolish the servile social conditions of the workers, which consist in the condition of a servile consciousness. The purpose of Marx's early works is, on the one hand, theoretical insofar as his anthropological exposition is understood as a first systematic examination of the illusory presentation of the dominant economic model and a "Hegelian" dialectic of labour,<sup>62</sup> and on the other hand, practical, in with regards to the *internal, material, real* contradictions that are irreconcilable with the critical conditions of reproduction of the "domination" of private property that appear and, in fact, are materially surpassed in reality. The concept of alienation is an epistemological condition for Marx's own emancipatory visions. Marx tries to capture the scientific elements and their verifiable basis, which make the overcoming of *material* servitude and the *material* alienation of the subject plausible in his self-objectification. The realization of needs-satisfaction constitutes the objectification of the person that labours.<sup>63</sup> The product of labour acquires a value (more precisely, social exchange value) that the worker only produces through his activity. On the basis of this task, labour functions as a transformer of an object in general, which is also itself a product with a certain value (here, the exchange value of wages). The worker (subject of labour) presents himself as an object for the other subject (subject of the enjoyment of someone else's labour) through the sale of his labour power.<sup>64</sup>

It can be said that these reflections on the notion of "domination" (*Herrschaft*) correspond to a general presentation of the first ideas of Marx. Other's (*fremd*) and alienated (*entfremdet*) jobs reproduce the inherent asymmetry of the relations of production, that is, the contradiction between private property and workers. The alienated worker does

not carry out a “self-finalizing action” but, rather, his forced labour as a negation of his ontological condition. Alienation implies, therefore, a status of not-being-alienated, which contributes to the abolition of its contradictoriness. Marx borrows his own use of the concept of methodological and terminological elements from Hegel’s *Phenomenology* that supports his early anthropological ideas. For the young Marx, Hegel is not a “dead dog”;<sup>65</sup> on the contrary, Hegel’s terminology functions as a linguistic-philosophical instrument for his own conception of the human, which in the later work with the concept of fetish acquires a value-theoretical character. Alienation as an early non-empirical figure in the presentation of capitalist society is more a developmental element for the subsequent presentation of the concept of the person as a carrier of a commodity than a necessary element of social formation. Both Marx’s critical interpretation of Hegel and the modification of early anthropological conceptions of him resulted in different readings on the role of Hegelian thought in relation to the reconstruction of a methodical presentation of society. The approach of the present study is in no way an adaptation of the Marxist concept of method to the Hegelian one but a correlate that explains some abstractions that concern the young Marx’s vision of the constitution of bourgeois society. In this master–slave dialectic redefined by the young Marx, Hegel’s mode of presentation plays an important role, not only to design an *epistemological* structure for the mode of development of the Self,<sup>66</sup> but this critical way of presenting thinking and its logical determinations work as a model for the development of the critical presentation of capitalist socialization in the late work.

## Notes

- 1 We can say three things about the relative autonomy of the *Phenomenology* in relation to the *Science of Logic*: (1) that the philosophy of spirit has a specific philosophical value; (2) that this specific value, in turn, requires an epistemological methodology; and (3) that the recognition of an epistemological methodology requires a systematic concept of the notion of totality.
- 2 The discussion about the relationship between *Phenomenology* and *Logic* is one of the richest in the Hegelian tradition. See Rolf-Peter Horstmann, “Der Anfang vor dem Anfang Zum Verhältnis der Logik zur Phänomenologie des Geistes“, in Anton Fr. et al (ed). *Hegel – 200 Jahre Wissenschaft der Logik* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2014), p. 43; Hans Fr. Fulda, *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1965) and, with a clearly differentiated point of view, Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1973); Johann Heinrich Trede, „Phänomenologie und Logik. Zu den Grundlagen einer Diskussion.“ *Hegel-Studien* 10 (1975), pp. 173–209.
- 3 Georg W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 71.
- 4 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 377: “Et si, comme le remarque très justement Marx, le Travail est pour Hegel ‘das Wesen des Menschen’, ‘l’essence même de l’Homme’ - on peut dire aussi que pour Hegel l’essence de l’homme est le Concept.”

- 5 Cf. Joseph Schumpeter, *Kapitalismus, Sozialismus und Demokratie* (Bern: A. Francke, 1946), p. 25. Classical philosophers such as Althusser and Balibar think that it is not possible to draw so much from the inversion of Hegel's dialectic in the epistemological affirmations of Marx. They reject any methodological connection between the two thinkers, arguing that the autonomy of Marx's observations on the capital system must be understood as a self-explaining systematization. Cf. Louis Althusser & Étienne Balibar, *Lire le Capital*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1969), pp. 211–212.
- 6 Cf. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 139.
- 7 Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844*, p. 569.
- 8 Cf. Pablo Pulgar Moya, *Die kritische Darstellung der Gesellschaftsformation* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2021), p. 31, n. 23.
- 9 Although this dialectic of force (*Kraft*) and power (*Macht*) is *not deepened* in Marx, they form codependent determinations. Power simply denotes the potential effectiveness of subjectivity. Force is the intentional energy that materially instantiates power.
- 10 Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 150.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- 12 "The desire to be certain of ourselves in our very relation to others is fulfilled not by consuming things, but by interacting with another self-consciousness—one that is not only capable of abstract self-awareness but also takes the form of desire and relates to a self-consciousness other than itself". Stephen Houlgate, "G. W. F. Hegel: The *Phenomenology of Spirit*", in Robert Solomon et al. (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 13.
- 13 Karl Marx, *Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, MEW, vol. 13, pp. 8–9.
- 14 Marx passes from the sphere of the metaphilosophical interpretation of the doctrine of Self to a macro level of the social existence of consciousness. In contrast to Hegel's science of the experience of consciousness, Marx's social interpretation of consciousness finds its claims of truth in the analysis of the socialization that forms individual consciousnesses. The self-consciousness of the "slave" is discussed in this way only in the consciousness of the social domination of capital over men. This form of social domination appears as direct oppositions based on the division of labour that makes up the classes. Marx's concept of consciousness can only be understood as class-consciousness if the "slave" sees himself as a producer, a worker, in order to socially abolish the social status of the asymmetric class order in relation to other workers.
- 15 What Hegel describes with self-consciousness is reinterpreted by Marx in a socially necessary economic space in the sense that the dominant "sameness" (*Selbstheit*) of the master's consciousness is the unity of Self (*Ich; in-itself*) and To Me (*Mir; to myself*). The dominant sameness in the consciousness of the slave is the unity of We (*Wir; in-itself*) and To Us (*Uns; for ourselves*).
- 16 This example from Feuerbach presents a critique of the idea of God that was later reformulated by Marx. Cf. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Leipzig, 1841), p. 85.
- 17 Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripten*, p. 517.
- 18 Helmut Reichelt, *Zur logischen Struktur des Kapitalbegriffs bei Karl Marx* (Freiburg: Ça ira, 2001); „Die Marxsche Kritik ökonomischer Kategorien. Überlegungen zum Problem der Geltung in der dialektischen Darstellungsmethode im *Kapital*“, Iring Fetscher et al. (eds). *Emanzipation als Versöhnung. Zu Adornos Kritik der ‚Warentausch-Gesellschaft‘ und Perspektiven der Transformation*. (Frankfurt: Neue Kritik, 2002).

- 19 Hans-Georg Backhaus, *Dialektik der Wertform* (Freiburg: Ça ira, 1997); Hans-Georg Backhaus & Helmur Reichelt, "Wie ist der Wertbegriff in der Ökonomie zu konzipieren? Zu Michel Heinrich: *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*", in *Beiträge zur Marx-Engels-Forschung* (1995), pp. 60–94.
- 20 Tommaso Redolfi Riva, "Teoría critica della società? Critica dell'economia politica. Adorno, Backhaus, Marx", in *Consecutio Temporum* 3:5(2013).
- 21 Riccardo Bellofiore, *La avventure della socializzazione* (Milano: Mimesis, 2018), pp. 12–22; "The adventures of *Vergesellschaftung*", in *Consecutio Rerum*. III: 5 (2019).
- 22 Cf. Michael Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert* (Hamburg: VSA, 1991), p. 105; Bellofiore, "The adventures of *Vergesellschaftung*", p. 529.
- 23 Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripten*, p. 519.: "wenn seine Tätigkeit ihm [dem Arbeiter] Qual ist, so muss sie einem andern *Genuß* und die Lebensfreude eines andern [des Eigentümer der Produktionsmittels] sein."
- 24 Cf. Karl Marx, *Deutsche Ideologie*, in MEW 3, p. 31: "Die Teilung der Arbeit wird erst wirklich Teilung von dem Augenblicke an, wo eine Teilung der materiellen und geistigen Arbeit eintritt. Von diesem Augenblicke an *kann* sich das Bewußtsein wirklich einbilden, etwas Andres als das Bewußtsein der bestehenden Praxis zu sein, *wirklich* etwas vorzustellen, ohne etwas Wirkliches vorzustellen—von diesem Augenblicke an ist das Bewußtsein imstande, sich von der Welt zu emanzipieren und zur Bildung der, reinen' Theorie, Philosophie, Moral etc. überzugehen".
- 25 Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, pp. 80–84.
- 26 Cf. Aristoteles, *Pol*, I 4, 1254a 14–17.
- 27 In his late work, Marx understands the term *political* as synonymous with *social* (*gesellschaftlich*) as an essential characteristic of economics. Neither politics nor economics can be self-explanatory. Only the philosophical presentation of political economy can explain the totality of *political* connections.
- 28 Éric Weil, *Hegel et l'État* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1950), p. 114.
- 29 Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 308.
- 30 Ibid., p. 377.
- 31 Cf. Jean-Yves Calvez, *La Pensée de Karl Marx* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1956).
- 32 Karl Marx, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte aus dem Jahre 1844*, in *Marx-Engels-Werke* (= MEW), vol. 40 (Berlin: Dietz, 1990), p. 574.
- 33 Diethard Behrens and Kornelia Hafner, *Westlicher Marxismus* (Stuttgart: Schmetterling, 2017), p. 502.
- 34 Hans Fulda remarks that "the motives for the concentration on anthropological themes embedded in a careful exegesis of the entire work remain factually important and (thanks to a new translation) they have developed a sensitized understanding of the qualities of the literary works and their philosophical language" Hans Fr. Fulda, "Hegels *Wissenschaft der Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Programm und Ausführung", in Michael Gerten (ed). *Hegel und die Phänomenologie des Geistes: Neue Perspektiven und Interpretationsansätze* (Würzburg: Königshausen u. Neumann, 2013), p. 33.
- 35 Cf. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 146.
- 36 Cf. Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), p. 230 ss. Particularly interesting is Honneth's position on the relationship of Marx's analysis to the "demand for recognition" as a reinterpretation of the master–slave dialectic.
- 37 Cf. Alexis Emanuel Gros, "Motivos hegelianos en la concepción del trabajo del Joven Marx", in *Revista Folios*, 43 (2016), p. 188.
- 38 Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 52.
- 39 Cf. Johann G. Fichte, *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* [1794], in *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 6 (Leipzig/Jena: Gabler, 1845–1846) p. 309.

- 40 Robert Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, Year, 2010), p. 11.
- 41 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode*, in *Gesammelte Werke* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).
- 42 Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Self-Consciousness* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2011); "Being, Time, and Politics: The Strauss-Kojève Debate", in *Theory and History*, 32:2 (1993), pp. 138–161.
- 43 Roberto Finelli, *Un parricidio mancato* (Torino, Bollati Brighieri, 2004), pp. 102–135.
- 44 Houlgate, "G. W. F. Hegel: The *Phenomenology of Spirit*", pp. 13–15.
- 45 Plainly, it is necessary to reconsider the beginning of the sphere of the master-slave dialectic in the struggle for life and death between understanding and object for consciousness (Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 149.). This object (Gegenstand, ob-iectus), which is seen as something other than Self, is first denied in the *sameness of Selbst* (in *being-for-itself*); that is, being-for-itself is understood only as an *act* of denial. But you have to make sure that the *necessary* object is a need or dependence on itself (Selbst). Being-other forms a moment of being-oneself and must be recognized in *self-consciousness* as *self-determination*, that is, as "certainty of oneself" (*Gewißheit seiner selbst*; *ibid.*, p. 148). However, for Hegel there is no reflection (*Spiegelung*) with the external object, which can neither affirm nor deny the other. He does not resist the subject. The other self-consciousness is subject insofar as it denotes the reflection of the concept of life that it realizes. As previously stated, in this development, there is a clash of both consciousnesses, which Hegel calls struggle for recognition (*ibid.*, p. 149.). In this struggle for recognition, the other self-consciousness, that is, the object, which, on the other hand, is also a self-conscious subject, appears as a self-consciousness that *denies* the individuality of Self. The immanent movement towards the other is its truth: self-consciousness moves towards another, in what Terry Pinkard calls "social space" (*Hegel's Phenomenology. The Sociality of Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 47.). This dialectic of self-consciousness is the overcoming of the *isolated* individual by the togetherness of both. It is necessary to realize what this overcoming means in order to understand the reconciliation of opposing consciousnesses. It is necessary to say that there is still no truth in the negation of the self-conscious other since self-consciousness does not yet lie (*iacet*) in the object (*ob-iectus*) as determination of the subject (*sub-iectus*). The exhibition of self-consciousness presents the moment of sublating the natural, abstract consciousness (the knowledge of the other). The sublated is, therefore, the unclear position (*Setzung*) of the immediate Dasein showed in *Phenomenology* as sense-certainty. This position (*Setzung*) of the first determinations of consciousness consists of an act that the world possesses through a singular structure of being-in-itself. The proposed immediacy of consciousness consists of a meta-theoretical dialectic of the beginning or, in other words, the starting point of the theory of knowledge.
- 46 Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 117: „[Der Herr] ist das *für sich* seiende Bewußtsein, aber nicht mehr nur der Begriff desselben, sondern für sich seiendes Bewußtsein, welches durch ein *anderes* Bewußtsein mit sich vermittelt ist."
- 47 Axel Honneth, „Von der Begierde zur Anerkennung. Hegels Begründung von Selbstbewusstsein“, in Klaus Vieweg et al. (eds). *Hegels Phänomenologie des*

- Geistes. Ein kooperativer Kommentar zu einem Schlüsselwerk der Moderne* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008), p. 196.
- 48 Kojève. *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, p. 55: “Mais le Maître combat en homme (pour la reconnaissance) et consomme comme un animal (sans avoir travaillé). Telle est son inhumanité. Il reste par là homme de la Begierde (qu’il réussit à satisfaire). Il ne peut dépasser ce stade, parce qu’il est oisif. Il peut mourir en homme, mais il ne peut vivre qu’en animal!”
- 49 It is important to specify what is meant by “desire”. Whether it has a meaning close to *ὄρεξις* (as the Aristotelian *inclination of the spirit*) or libido (*désir*, as in Hyppolite, Kojève, and Garaudy) contributes to a great discussion. “Self-consciousness is a desire [Begierde] in general” (Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 139) because it creates a natural animal desire, but at the same time through it, self-consciousness seeks to be recognized as valid in relation to the Other. In this context, we identify at least three moments of desire that constructs the concept in the *Phänomenologie*: (1) desire as a desire for self-affirmation of its own unity; (2) Desire for another as a perceiving object, and (3) Desire as a desire for recognition of the Self, of one’s own, *by the Other*. The complexity of this concept makes it possible to characterize desire as self-consciousness. Much has been written during this period against these loose interpretations of the concept of self-consciousness and, above all, of the concept of desire. So Stephen Houlgate: “In my view, however, Kojève seriously distorts Hegel’s account of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* by conflating the idea that desire is the activity of negation with the further idea that the subject of desire is essential, empty. According to Kojève, the desiring subject is an *emptiness* (*vide*) greedy for content; an emptiness that wants to be filled by what is full”. Houlgate, “G. W. F. Hegel: The *Phenomenology of Spirit*”, p. 13.
- 50 Luis Mariano de la Maza, “La interpretación antropológica de la Fenomenología del espíritu. Aportes y problemas”, in *Revista de Filosofía* 68 (2012), p. 98.
- 51 Marx. *Auszüge aus James Mills Buch* Eléments d’économie politique, in MEW 40 pp. 443–463.
- 52 Marx. *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripten*, p. 513. „Die Entfremdung des Arbeiters in seinem Gegenstand drückt sich nach nationalökonomischen Gesetzen so aus, daß, je mehr der Arbeiter produziert, [...] um so ohnmächtiger der Arbeiter wird, daß, je gestreicher die Arbeit, um so mehr geistloser und Naturknecht der Arbeiter wird.
- 53 Therefore, it is useful for our purpose to base the four dimensions of alienation under capitalist relations of production, which Marx distinguishes in the *Paris Manuscripts* (Ibid., pp. 511–519):
1. Alienation of the worker from the object of his activity. In this analysis, the worker appears to his work product as an “alien essence.”
  2. Alienation of the worker within his activity. As long as the worker is a “means” for the enjoyment of others, it is “the *external* labour to the worker.”
  3. So, the alienation of the worker from the human essence. The production of the labour’s object is “therefore, the *objectification of the species of human life*,” provided that the individual worker does not carry out any activity of self-interest but depends on indirect enjoyment in the context of wage labour.
  4. Alienation of the worker from others. Product of labour does not belong to its producer if it is “under the domination, compulsion, and yoke of another man.”



- All these four dimensions form different moments of a unified concept. For the young Marx, alienation is the *outer essence* of the capitalist form of labour.
- 54 Ibid., p. 540.
- 55 Cf. Karen Gloy, "'Herrschaft und Knechtschaft' in Hegels *Phänomenologie des Geistes*", in *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 39:2 (1985), p. 186.
- 56 Heinrich, *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 96.
- 57 At the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, this example can be found (but regarding the nature of knowledge), cf. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, pp. 68–69.
- 58 Marx. *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripten*, p. 540.
- 59 Theodor Adorno, "Theorie der Halbbildung", in *Soziologische Schriften*, vol. I (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 115.
- 60 Authors such as Georg Lohmann, Wolfgang Fritz Haug, and Michael Heinrich are renowned representatives (with differences) of this position. In contrast, Maximilien Rubel is one of the best-known defenders of an ethical interpretation of Marx's theory. Cf. Maximilien Rubel, *Karl Marx. Essai de biographie intellectuelle* (Paris: Marcel Rivière et Cie, 1957), pp. 341; 400.
- 61 Heinrich. *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, 1991, p. 98.
- 62 In Hegel and Feuerbach, both consciousness and alienation are found exclusively on the level of (Self)-consciousness or (self)-knowledge. While for Hegel, the spirit completes the consciousness, for Feuerbach, it is the human. On the other hand, for Marx human is only in connection with others who reproduce modern (= bourgeois) society, i.e., the producers.
- 63 The young Marx thinks of labour in general - in relation to the human species - as self-realization or self-objectification of the subject. This means that man creates his essence in productive activity. It should be noted that the alienation of people in the capitalist system is a derealization or de-objectification; regarding this derealization and its comparison with Hegel's thinking, cf. Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch, *Hegels Begriff der Arbeit* (Berlin: Akademie, 2001), p. 114.
- 64 Marx. *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripten*, pp. 511–512: "Der Gegenstand, den die Arbeit produziert, ihr Produkt, tritt ihm als ein *fremdes Wesen*, als eine von dem Produzenten *unabhängige Macht* gegenüber. Das Produkt der Arbeit ist die Arbeit, die sich in einem Gegenstand fixiert, sachlich gemacht hat, es ist die *Vergegenständlichung* der Arbeit. Die Verwirklichung der Arbeit ist ihre Vergegenständlichung. Diese Verwirklichung der Arbeit scheint in dem nationalökonomischen Zustand als *Entwirklichung* des Arbeiters, die Vergegenständlichung als *Verlust und Knechtschaft des Gegenstandes*, die Aneignung als *Entfremdung*, als Entäußerung."
- 65 Cf. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. I, in MEW 23, p. 27.
- 66 Despite their detailed analyses of Marx's *Capital* and Hegel's *Logic*, authors such as Christopher Arthur and Enrique Dussel tend to reduce the social level of abstraction to a coincident scheme of manifestations. Dussel works out the similarities between Marx's real abstraction and Hegel's system of logic in an isomorphic representation method in order to show the logical coherence in *Capital* step by step.

## 7 Hegel on Death<sup>1</sup>

*Michael Inwood*

In his lectures on Hegel, Alexandre Kojève maintained that death is the central notion of Hegel's philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Hegel was, he claimed, the first to acknowledge the supreme importance of death, that if humans did not die, they would not be genuine individuals; they would not be free, and they would not be historical.<sup>3</sup> The core of Hegelianism is thus an adequate recognition of one's own mortality and finitude.<sup>4</sup> This commits Hegel to rejecting two traditional beliefs: first, that a human individual has an 'immortal soul' or 'survives' death in some transcendent sense<sup>5</sup> and, second, that God exists.<sup>6</sup> Kojève's view of these matters was influenced by other German philosophers, notably Heidegger, but here he is at odds with Heidegger. Although Heidegger attributed great importance to death and our recognition of it, he held that this leaves open the possibility of an afterlife.<sup>7</sup> Heidegger was also non-committal on the question of God or gods. Similarly, Max Scheler insisted that recognition of death, far from excluding belief in an afterlife, is a precondition of it.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Kojève insists that if death is to play the part Hegel assigns to it, it must be a final death, not a prelude to an afterlife, and there can be no other world populated by souls and deities.

In the first section of this chapter, I consider some of Hegel's uses of death as a metaphor and their significance for his view of death in the literal sense. In the second section, I examine some of the passages on which Kojève based his claim that death is of central importance to Hegel. The conclusion of this section is that, while death is important, it is not so crucially important—either in Hegel or in fact—as Kojève believed. In the third section, I examine the relationships between death, God, and the afterlife. I argue, against Kojève, that these three issues are distinct and that Hegel's response to any one of them does not commit him to giving any particular answer to the others.

### 7.1 I

Death is a recurrent theme in PS.<sup>9</sup> Its first significant occurrence, in §32, is primarily metaphorical. We are confronted by a representation of something 'actual', such as a house or a dog, something that exists independently. By

means of the 'understanding', we distill from it, by analysis, various of its properties, or accidents, such as its shape, color, or size. Such properties cannot exist independently in the way that the house of the dog does. There can be no shape, color or size that is not the shape, color, or size of some concrete object. These properties are therefore 'non-actual' or, as Hegel now adds, 'dead'. This apparently innocuous step is now presented in more dramatic terms:

Death, if this is what we want to call this non-actuality, is the most dreadful thing, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest force.... But the life of the spirit<sup>10</sup> is not the life that shrinks from death—and keeps clear of devastation—it is the life that endures death and preserves itself in it. Spirit gains its truth only when, in absolute disintegration, it finds itself. It is this power, not as the positive which averts it[s] eyes from the negative, as when we say of something that it is negative or false, and then, finished with it, turn away and pass on to something else; spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and by dwelling on it. Dwelling on the negative is the magic force that converts it into Being.

It is not clear that this account is justified, or even compatible with Hegel's remarks elsewhere. In §46, he takes a less charitable view of the 'lifeless' concepts of pure mathematics, and in §50, he is scornful of Kant's 'dead' and 'lifeless' triplicity. Neither of these is redeemed by its death. Moreover, however dreadful death may be for its victim, it is not clear why it is equally dreadful for the killer who surveys his corpse. It is, after all, the death of the non-actual properties that is in prospect, not that of spirit itself. Hegel could reply to this, however, that spirit is not independent of non-actual properties in the way that it can perhaps dispense with mathematical formulae and Kantian triplicity.

A more serious objection to Hegel's characterisation of death in §32 is that it is simply metaphorical and does not have much force in determining that actual status of death or even Hegel's view of it. The philosophical project of pushing analysis to the limit seems a far cry from the urge to show one's mettle on the battlefield, the boxing ring, or the school playground. Hegel himself displayed no such urge. He did not fight in a war. He did not engage in dueling. He did not even beat Mrs. Hegel. His famous suggestion that self-consciousness requires physical conflict is, as we shall see, heavily qualified in his later works.

PS ends, as it began, with another metaphorical death: the death of God. Hegel twice anticipates Nietzsche (and Lutheran hymn books) in proclaiming 'God is dead'. In §752, the dictum records the desiccation of religion in the Roman empire, while in §785 the 'death' of the old God is consequent upon the death of the mediator, Christ. God is now brought down to earth, while humanity has risen to meet him halfway. This conclusion is confirmed by the concluding paragraph, §808.

The remainder of this chapter is concerned with Hegel's views on literal death, both in PS and in his other works.

## 7.2 II

- a. In an early essay, *Natural Law* (1st German edition 1802/3), Hegel argues that our ability to die makes us free. Fichte had proposed a system of punishments, including the death penalty, to ensure appropriate behavior. Hegel objects that human conduct cannot be determined in this way, since one can choose to die rather than do what is required. Someone can submit to the death penalty and, given the opportunity, evade by suicide any other penalty imposed: 'by his ability to die the subject proves himself free and entirely above all coercion'.<sup>11</sup>
- b. So far, Hegel has argued that a person is free if they are *able* to die. Later, he suggested that to be a fully fledged person—free and self-conscious—one must risk one's life in combat. An individual thereby shows 'that it is not attached to any specific existence, not attached to the universal individuality of existence in general, that it is not attached to life'<sup>12</sup> Consider the question: 'Does he love me for my money or for myself, for my own sake? Am I anything more to him—or to myself—than a five-figure income?' One way of answering this question is to put one's money at risk. One's readiness to lose one's money establishes a distance between oneself and the money, both in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others. Hegel seems to have held that to be fully self-conscious, one must distance oneself not only from one's transitory states, characteristics, and possessions but also from one's very life. I am distinct from my wealth and from, say, my beauty and my intelligence. I can endure their loss, persist after they have gone, and even retain the love or respect of others despite their loss. Of course, others may continue to love or respect me after my death; they may even discover how much I meant to them only after my passing. However, Hegel does not seem to have this in mind: if my opponent kills me, the game is over and he simply moves on in search of another adversary. In any case, I surely cannot really persist after the loss of my life, and I cannot therefore be distinct from my life.
- c. The relation between a person and their life raises the question of suicide. In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel maintains that our ability to kill ourselves distinguishes us from all other animals. It shows that 'I possess ... my body, my life, only so long as I will to possess them'.<sup>13</sup> In his lectures, however, he seems to have argued that no one has a *right* to kill himself or herself. The argument runs:
  - i. I am not distinct from my life.
  - ii. So if I have a right over my own life, I have a right over myself.

- iii. But no one can have a right over themself.
- iv. So no one has a right over their own life.<sup>14</sup>

Premise (iii) is problematic. Hegel does not explain why someone cannot have a right over himself or herself, beyond saying that 'he does not stand over himself and he cannot pass judgment on himself' (loc. cit.). He may have had difficulty in accepting that a relation can be genuinely reflexive, holding between something and itself—although that would imply not only that suicide is wrong but also that it is impossible. A more likely interpretation is that if I make a judgment about my life, such as that it is not worth living owing, say, to my wrongdoing, this judgment is not simply distinct from my life but is itself a part of my life: I am not simply a wrongdoer but a repentant wrongdoer. Within my life, I can never escape my life; whatever I do or think about my life automatically becomes a part of my life and does not just 'stand over' it. This interpretation helps to square this argument with that of the *Phenomenology*, which runs in the reverse direction:

- i. The combatant risks his life.
- ii. So if he is identical with his life, he risks himself.
- iii. But no one can risk himself.
- iv. So he cannot be identical with his life.

The combatant puts his life at risk, but he does not pass judgment on it or on himself. We might again challenge premise (iii). But we can also ask whether, if I am distinct from my life, it follows that I do or may outlast my life. If *x* is genuinely distinct from *y*, their careers should not necessarily be coterminous. This raises the question of Hegel's beliefs about the dead person.

- d. Hegel associates death with universality. In *Natural Law*, he says that 'the pure individuality which is in death, is its own opposite, universality'.<sup>15</sup> The *Phenomenology* describes the dead person as one 'who, after the long succession of dispersed Being-there, has concentrated himself into a complete configuration, and has raised himself out of the unrest of contingent life into the calm of simple universality' (PS §451). A first approach to deciphering these remarks might be to distinguish the individual person from their characteristics. Socrates, for example, was short, ugly, and wise. But his death whittled him down to a bare individual (an *I* = *I*, as German idealists liked to say), who is universal in the sense that as a bare individual he does not differ from any other bare individual. Alternatively, we might suppose that it is Socrates's general properties that constitute the 'simple universality' of his death: Socrates is short, ugly, and wise, even though he is no longer a living, embodied individual.

However, neither of these interpretations captures what Hegel had in mind. He first faces the difficulty that, unless there is an attenuated afterlife, Socrates is not now a bare individual: he no longer exists at all. Hegel does suppose that the Christian doctrine of immortality<sup>16</sup> derives from a 'self-consciousness which endlessly yields up its particularity and individuality,' a 'subjectivity which has ... abandoned all distinctions of authority, power, position, and even of race'.<sup>17</sup> But his remarks about death in *Natural Law* and in the *Phenomenology* seem quite general and not to involve specifically Christian beliefs. The second interpretation, which reduces Socrates to a set of properties, which might in principle belong to someone other than Socrates is also unsatisfactory. Hegel wants to draw a distinction between a person and his life or his living body. But this interpretation loses that distinction, first, because many of someone's general features, such as shortness and ugliness, depend on and cannot outlast the body and, second, because it equates a person's individuality with their body, leaving a free-floating set of properties that might belong to anyone. Such a set of properties could hardly outlast their bearer—except in our *memory* of the dead. Neither interpretation does justice to our memory of the dead. We remember Socrates neither as a bare individual nor as a set of properties but as someone who was short, ugly, and wise—fleshed out with further details for near contemporaries who knew him in person and at earlier stages of his life or for late-comers who have read accounts of him. Insofar as we think about dead individuals, we normally think of them as they were in life.

- e. A more promising approach to the association of death with universality is suggested by Hegel's account of the deaths of the Homeric heroes, Patroclus and Hector: 'With death, only nature is finished, not the man, not custom and ethical life, which requires the honor of burial for the fallen hero'.<sup>18</sup> Here, Hegel contrasts nature with custom and ethical life. Elsewhere he contrasts nature with 'spirit':<sup>2</sup>

Death has a double meaning: (a) it is precisely the immediate passing away of the natural, (b) it is the death of the purely natural and therefore the birth of something higher, namely the spiritual realm to which the merely natural dies in the sense that the spirit has this element of death in itself as belonging to its essence.<sup>19</sup>

The central idea here is that, while death is a natural event and the physical remains of the dead are a natural entity, burial and funeral rites 'spiritualise' the dead, distancing them from their dead, natural remnants, and thereby reaffirm the customs and values of the community, their distinctness from the purely natural, and their persistence beyond the lives of the community's individual members. What is primarily 'spiritual' or 'universal' are these customs and values, and death enables us to disentangle them from their individual bearers

and their natural life processes. But individuals, too, are 'universal' insofar as they are bearers of these values, and, again, the death of individuals enables us (and themselves in prospect) to disentangle the spiritual self or some of its aspects from the natural self. The spiritual or universal individual is neither a bare individual nor a set of properties but an individual endowed with spiritual characteristics. (We might conjecture that spiritual features are those that we can appropriately ascribe to the dead in the present tense. Thus, Socrates is no more, but he *is* a philosopher. Natural features are consigned to the past tense—Socrates was short and ugly, but he no longer *is* so. This may be because spirit, unlike nature, can leave remnants of a long-dead person in the present. Thus, Virgil *is* a poet, because his poems survive, whereas Gallus *was* a poet, because hardly any of his work survives.)

- f. Hegel holds that what is left of someone after their death is what is essential to them or what they essentially are and that beliefs about what remains after death are also beliefs about what one essentially is: 'Death takes from man what is temporal, transitory in him, but it has no power over what he is in and for himself'.<sup>20</sup> One is self-conscious to the extent that that one has an adequate conception of what one essentially is (loc. cit.). We might therefore be tempted to suppose that Hegel's combatant in *Phenomenology* believes in an afterlife, believes that by risking his life he shows that he, what he essentially is, can survive the loss of his life with all its concrete trappings—just as one can survive the loss of one's wealth. But this interpretation, besides the lack of textual support for it, gets matters the wrong way round. On Hegel's view, one does not become self-conscious by developing afterlife beliefs; one develops afterlife beliefs in virtue of one's self-consciousness. Self-consciousness involves an awareness of what one essentially is, and this, Hegel believes, entails an ability to distinguish between oneself and one's bodily life but in a sense that does not necessarily imply that the one can outlast the other. That one does or can deliberately risk one's life (or put an end to it) establishes that one is self-conscious in this sense, because it shows that one is a two-tiered creature that can, to paraphrase Hegel, 'stand over and pass judgment on one's life'. But it would be mistaken to suppose that this ability establishes a stronger distinction than this between oneself and one's life. To risk, or to put an end to, one's life is to risk or put an end to *oneself*, and even if this sets some distance between the one who risks and the one who is risked, it cannot plausibly be argued that the one can outlast the other.

There is, then, a connection between self-consciousness and death. To know what it is for me to die involves knowing the difference between my ceasing to exist and my simply undergoing some inessential change; to contemplate one's own death focuses one's mind

on what is essential to oneself and one's own life and diverts one from the inessential and peripheral. It is, however, doubtful whether this connection obtains only when one risks or encompasses one's own death. To fear for one's life, to attempt to preserve it, or simply to contemplate one's own death similarly involve 'standing over' one's own life, and perhaps 'passing judgment' on it. Risking one's life in combat is surely just one dramatic way of manifesting self-consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

- g. If self-consciousness, or the recognition of it by oneself and others, requires an actual life-and-death combat, then not everyone is self-conscious or recognised as such, since not everyone engages in a life-and-death combat, even if they are able to do so. There are three alternatives here:
  - i. Retain the strong link between self-consciousness and combat and say, in consequence, that only those who risk their lives, primarily soldiers, are fully self-conscious.
  - ii. Retain the link between self-consciousness and combat but dilute the notion of combat so that almost everyone can be seen as engaging in it and therefore as self-conscious.<sup>22</sup>
  - iii. Break the link between self-consciousness and combat by consigning the life-and-death struggle to the past.

Hegel toys with each of these alternatives. In *Natural Law* he presents a version of (i). Under the influence of Plato's *Republic*, he sketches a constitution with three classes: warrior-rulers, traders, and workers. Only the warriors are free, although this seems to be because one establishes a claim to full membership of a society by *readiness* to fight for it rather than because of anything that *actual* combat does for one as an individual.<sup>23</sup> In later writings, although Hegel insists on the necessity of warfare, he does not seem to require that everyone should fight, and the stress is on what warfare does for society as a whole rather than for the individual. (Hegel himself never fought in a war.) Hegel also adheres to a version of (ii). In his *Encyclopedia*, he argues that a stage of youthful idealism, in which one is at odds with one's society and the world in general, is an essential stage in a man's development from the naive contentment of childhood to the sophisticated contentment of old age.<sup>24</sup> Hegel's dominant view, however, seems to be (iii). In the *Encyclopedia*, he qualifies the account given in *Phenomenology*. The life-and-death struggle, he says, is no longer required for recognition. In the modern, that is Hegel's own, State, one acquires recognition as a free, rational being by doing one's job and performing one's civic duties. Dueling, the modern equivalent of a life-and-death struggle, is a barbarous relic of the Middle Ages. The life-and-death struggle occurs, and is required for recognition, in the state of nature, 'where men exist only as single, separate individuals'.



Society and the State may have originated in such struggles, but they no longer require them: 'although the State may originate in violence, it does not rest on it'.<sup>25</sup>

This suggests that death plays a lesser part,<sup>26</sup> at least in Hegel's mature thought, than Kojève supposed. Not only is the connection between risk of death and self-consciousness tenuous and controversial. Even in Hegel's eyes, the risk of death in combat plays a limited, historical role; it is not a necessary and essential feature of everyone's life in all periods of history.

- h. Violent deaths often occur in warfare, however. Throughout his career, Hegel stressed the benefits of warfare to a society. In peacetime, individuals tend to become indifferent to their social and political institutions and absorbed in their private interests. Warfare brings them back into the fold: 'Just as the blowing of the winds preserves the sea from the foulness which would result from a continual calm, so also corruption would result for peoples under continual or indeed "perpetual" peace'.<sup>27</sup> In PS §455, Hegel applies this doctrine to the 'ethical world' portrayed in Greek tragedy, specifically to the war between the brothers Eteocles and Polynices for the throne of Thebes. The fear of the 'lord and master, death' inspired by war restores the citizens' allegiance to the State—a claim that is presumably not incompatible with the claim, in PS §194, that fear of death focuses one's attention on one's own Self, since, apart from the state of nature, a proper Self is primarily a member of the State.<sup>28</sup> Hegel's argument is not simply that a State must be ready to go to war if the need and occasion arise but that it must have enemies with whom it occasionally goes to war, if it is to be a proper State, if indeed the society is not to die of inactivity.<sup>29</sup> Warfare does for the State what, in the state of nature, single combat did for the individual. It does not follow that warfare is primarily an occasion of single combat. In his own day, Hegel notes, guns and cannons have superseded individual combat. Moreover, risking one's life is of no value unless it is done for the right cause: the soldier's risk binds him closer to the State, and this is what distinguishes him from the criminal.<sup>30</sup>

The connection between warfare and the death of individuals is less close than Kojève, and perhaps Hegel, assume. First, it is not obvious that the strength and duration of a war's unifying effect are directly proportional to the number of those who die, or risk death, in it. The so-called Falklands factor—the boost to Mrs. Thatcher's electoral prospects, stemming from her victory in the war against Argentina in 1982—extended far beyond the ranks of those who risked their lives. Again, in the 'Cod Wars' of the 1970s between the UK and Iceland over fishing rights, nobody was killed, apart from the odd accidental death, and strenuous efforts were made to avoid

such an eventuality, but the social effects of the war, though muted in the UK, were significant in Iceland. Second, many events in which the risk of death is not an essential ingredient (although it may accompany them)—international sporting events, strikes, royal weddings, and so on—have an effect comparable to that of warfare, diverting participants and spectators from their private interests and eliciting unaccustomed sacrifices. Third, if people did not die, or could die only from old age and not from violence, warfare could still occur and have effects that Hegel attributes to it. There are severe risks and sacrifices apart from death—exile, enslavement, destruction of property—and some of them, such as prolonged torture, are worse than death. The process of dying may well be a messy and painful business, but equally it may not, and the state of being dead is free of all pain and pleasure. Hegel is surely mistaken to say that death ‘is the most dreadful thing’ (PS §32).

- i. As we have seen in (e), Hegel holds that a society exploits the death of one of its members to celebrate its values, its continuity and its distinctness from nature.<sup>31</sup> He assumes, reasonably, that death occurs and considers how societies handle it. We can nevertheless ask what difference it would make to human communities if their members did not die (or emigrate or dispose of themselves in other ways that would be socially equivalent to death). A society would not, in that case, outlive its members, but it would still be larger than each of them. Kojève assumes that someone who was immortal would also be infinite.<sup>32</sup> But Hegel knew that the immortal gods of the Homeric epics were not regarded as infinite. He also believed that the planets are everlasting, and yet not infinite: each planet has its appointed place in a larger system.<sup>33</sup> The same might be true of immortal people. Such a society could not reaffirm its continuity and distinctness from nature by celebrating the deaths of its members, but there might still be disruptive natural events, such as illness and earthquakes, by reference to which it could do so. The most important difference that immortality (or even greatly increased longevity) would make is that new births could occur only rarely. Hegel was not much concerned with population growth as such, but he insisted that there are limits to the size of any particular type of society. A society’s constitution cannot remain the same if its members increase significantly in number.<sup>34</sup> He tends to associate death with procreation. Once parents have produced and educated new citizens, they have fulfilled their function and can pass away. Old citizens move on to make room for their replacements.<sup>35</sup>
- j. Could there be history without death? Could a society that retained the same immortal members have a history, or would it remain static and repetitive, like the solar system? On Hegel’s view, the natural course of a man’s life runs from the naive contentment of childhood,

through the discontent of youth, to the sophisticated contentment of old age. If one does not die in war, one generally dies of contentment:

[A] man is killed by habit, i.e. if he has once come to feel completely at home in life, ... a man is active only in so far as he has not attained his end and wills to develop his potentialities and vindicate himself in struggling to attain it. When this has been fully achieved, activity and vitality are at an end, and the result—loss of interest in life—is mental or physical death.<sup>36</sup>

In old age we tend to settle into a routine and do not change our conduct or ideas significantly, at least in sufficient numbers to account for historic changes.<sup>37</sup> It is true that, in Hegel's view, historical development occurs not only within a society but also by the emergence of a different society, for example Rome taking over from Greece. But this could not happen without development within a society. Rome could not have taken over from Greece if, for centuries past, its inhabitants had felt 'completely at home in life'.

It might be objected that if humans were immortal, there is no reason to suppose that their lives would follow the same pattern as they do now, that after a brief period of discontent they would lapse into an eternity of eternal contentment. Why might they not retain their youthful idealism for eternity? One difficulty with that is that then history would happen too quickly and make little sense to its participants, with no breathing spaces of relative contentment or periods of consolidation. No doubt these are not the only alternatives, and we could devise imaginary immortals so as to make a coherent history possible. But unless more is said about what these immortals would be like—and there are indefinitely many alternative things that might be said—the answer to the question, 'Could there be history without death?' remains indeterminate.<sup>38</sup>

### 7.3

Kojève held that Hegel's recognition of death is equivalent to a denial of any afterlife and this, in turn, to atheism. *Prima facie*, these equivalences do not obtain. One might coherently believe in a creator God without believing in an afterlife, perhaps for the reason that humans are not only rational but also *animals*, evolved from *non-rational* animals—who might therefore need to be taken on board along with ourselves.<sup>39</sup> Conversely, reputable philosophers such as J.M.E. McTaggart and H.H. Price, have endorsed belief in an afterlife, while rejecting or neglecting God.<sup>40</sup> Kojève's main objection to theism is that God would determine human history—whether in its final goal or also in its fine detail—and thus deprive us of our freedom.<sup>41</sup> But this overlooks the intense commitment of, say, Thomas Aquinas to human freedom, despite the difficulty of reconciling this with divine foreknowledge, and Pico della Mirandola's

belief that while God determines the careers of other animals, he leaves human beings free to decide their own course. These beliefs may strike us as eccentric, or even absurd, but they are not obviously self-contradictory, and they deserve more careful scrutiny than Kojève gave to them.

The reasons we have considered for regarding death as important are not similarly reasons for denying an afterlife. The connections between death and freedom or self-consciousness are strengthened if the person in question believes in an afterlife, at least in Hegel's view:

The immortality of the soul lies very close to the freedom of the spirit, because the self comprehends itself as withdrawn from the naturalness of existence and as resting on itself; but this self-knowledge is the principle of freedom.<sup>42</sup>

Immortal souls, unlike embodied immortals, cannot overpopulate human societies or retard the course of human history.<sup>43</sup> There is perhaps some disharmony between history and afterlife-belief. First, if, as Hegel believed, human ways of thought change radically over history, how does this affect the dead? Do they retain the thought-patterns they had in life so that Homer now gapes at Hegel uncomprehendingly? Are they whittled down to some uniform pattern so that they can communicate in an elementary fashion? Or does the world of the afterlife have a history of its own so that Homer has by now caught up with Hegel and Hegel with Einstein? No doubt there are several possible solutions to this problem, but for the most part, believers in an afterlife have not taken history as seriously as Hegel does. Second, if we are immortal, our earthly life is a brief and insignificant interlude. Why then bother to build empires and accumulate vast fortunes? One reason is that afterlife beliefs are not generally held at the same level as beliefs about this life and are insulated from contact with them, except perhaps when one's death is an imminent prospect. Another is that afterlife beliefs often prescribe one's conduct in worldly life, and one's expectations in the hereafter are held to depend on one's earthly conduct. There seems to be no necessary incompatibility between an afterlife, or at least belief in an afterlife, and an active worldly life.<sup>44</sup>

Hegel's own views on the afterlife are complex and equivocal. In the first place, his inclination is to turn the question into a historical one, asking not, as previous philosophers had done, 'Is the soul immortal?' but 'Why have some peoples believed in immortality and others not?' and 'Why have different peoples had different conceptions of immortality?' In general, he held that different peoples have asked different questions and given different answers to them, not because they were simply misguided, but because they thought in systematically different ways both from each other and from ourselves. As far as death is concerned, he draws connections between the following factors and believes that they vary in harmony with one another:

- i. Attitudes to death, as expressed primarily in beliefs about what happens after one's own death. What happens after one's death need not be other-worldly immortality. It may be, for example, the survival of one's posterity and of the family property.<sup>45</sup>
- ii. The type of honor paid to the dead and the treatment of their physical remains:

The honor which is shown to the dead is wholly dependent upon the idea of immortality.... The methods followed by peoples in their treatment of the dead stands in the closest connection with the religious principle, and the different customs which are usual at burial are not without bearings of very great importance.<sup>46</sup>

PS itself presents two radically different conceptions of death and of the appropriate response to it. On one hand, there were the beliefs and practices of the Greeks portrayed in tragedy: the crucial importance of appropriate burial rites that give spiritual significance to death making it far more than a merely natural event. These beliefs and practices are championed by Antigone. On the other hand, there were the beliefs and practices of the French revolutionaries, which Hegel describes as follows:

The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore death, a death moreover which has no inner range and filling, for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free Self; it is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or a mouthful of water.

(PS §590)

The burial rites were presumably equally perfunctory.

- iii. Our conception of ourselves. The differences between the afterlife beliefs of ancient Greeks, early Christians, and the Christians of Hegel's day depend in part on differences in their beliefs about the soul and the body.<sup>47</sup> Doctrines of immortality depend on self-consciousness, freedom, an 'inner space, ... inner extension, ... [a] soul of such an extent as to lead it to wish for satisfaction within itself'.<sup>48</sup> Peoples who believe in immortality have a more developed conception of themselves, indeed are more developed *selves*, than those who do not.
- iv. The type of social order and the individual's relationship to it. For example, before Socrates, the ancient Greeks had no strong conception of or belief in personal immortality. They were too closely integrated into their State to require such a belief. Death is not terrifying if one identifies oneself closely with one's society and descendants. It only becomes terrifying in the Roman empire, when people became individualists, detached from their society and having only themselves to fall back on.<sup>49</sup>

Most notably, Hegel himself, like Kojève, claims that belief in God and belief in immortality inevitably go together: 'The ideas of God and of immortality have a necessary relation to each other; when a man knows truly about God, he knows truly about himself too'.<sup>50</sup> Yet for Hegel, this connection is not only historical. He affirms, *pace* Kojève, his own belief both in God and in immortality. However, the notions of immortality and of God undergo such extensive revision in Hegel's hands that few commentators have accepted his claim to believe in immortality, and some have denied his belief in God.<sup>51</sup> To say that a spirit is immortal does not mean, for Hegel, that it is of endless duration or even that it endures beyond the death of the body. The spirit's immortality consists in its '*eternity*'—'which is not simply duration, as duration can be predicated of mountains'.<sup>52</sup> The spirit is eternal in virtue of its present state rather than its future state—its freedom, self-consciousness, and 'universality' (*loc. cit.*). On Hegel's account of immortality, it would make no sense to suggest that spirits communicate with each other after death or that belief in immortality might lead to a devaluation of earthly life. Analogously, Hegel's God is no longer transcendent but immanent; to believe in God is not to believe in an entity distinct from the world but to hold that the world has a certain unfolding logical structure. With these revisions it is more plausible to suppose that God and immortality go together, that there is, namely, a deep connection between how one sees the world and how one sees oneself. Naturally enough, Hegel did not expect his doctrines to be shared or even understood by the bulk of his contemporaries. He presented himself as an orthodox Lutheran who accepted and even participated in the worship and death rituals customary in his society. But his own doctrines provide the worship and rituals with their rational, philosophical underpinning.

Hegel's views on immortality can be represented, in rough outline, by the pattern referred to earlier: I. Naïve contentment, II. Youthful discontent, III. Sophisticated contentment. Stage I is that of primitive people. They believed in no otherworldly afterlife: there is nothing but their physical body and that of their descendants. Correspondingly, they have an undeveloped sense of themselves; they lack proper self-consciousness and cannot distinguish themselves from their body, their property, or, perhaps, their social order. At stage II, they develop self-consciousness to various degrees. They do so by projecting their true selves into a life that endures beyond their bodies. This is the only way in which they can form a conception of what they essentially are: what I essentially am is what persists after death. At stage III, Hegel's own stage, we retain and develop the self-consciousness acquired at stage II but no longer need an afterlife to support it: 'immortality' is seen in terms of eternity rather than duration. I can, for example, distinguish between myself and my body without supposing that I shall outlast my body.

Like almost everyone else, Hegel acknowledged that humans die, and death is relevant to several of his themes. It is not, however, so central or essential as Kojève believed. Whether there is an afterlife or not is a distinct question. Hegel believed in it only in an attenuated form, but he regarded substantial afterlife belief as a crucial fact of human history. If our ancestors had not believed in it, we would not be as we now are.

## Notes

- 1 An earlier version of this chapter appeared in the *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies* (I, 1986) pp. 109–120. The original version benefited greatly from helpful suggestions made by Dr. S. Lovibond, Dr. Z. A. Pelczynski, Dr. C. Sourvinou-Inwood, Professor W. H. Walsh, and Dr. S. Wolfram.
- 2 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel. Leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes* (ed. Raymond Queneau, Paris: Gallimard, 1947), pp. 529–575.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 555.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 551.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 536f.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 538f.
- 7 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953), p. 292; 247f.
- 8 Max Scheler, *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (Berlin: Der Neue Geist Verlag, 1933).
- 9 In references to works of Hegel, I give a page reference first for the English translation and then for the German text, except that when a work is divided into numbered paragraphs, I give the paragraph number alone. In the latter case, the letter Z stands for 'Zusatz', indicating that the reference is to an 'addition', composed by Hegel's original editors from his own and his pupils' lecture notes. Page references to other translated works follow the same pattern. I have occasionally altered the wording of the translations to which I refer.
- 10 'Geist' (spirit or mind), a word with no exact English counterpart, has a variety of uses in Hegel—psychological, theological, and sociological, among others. Whereas in English we tend to think of a person as bipartite, consisting of body and mind or of body and soul, Germans tend to regard us as tripartite, consisting of body, soul, and spirit. The soul (*Seele*) is what animates the body and is the seat of feeling, emotion, desire, and so on while spirit is the more intellectual component. When expressing his own views, Hegel speaks of the 'immortality of (the) spirit', rather than of the 'soul', a term that he reserves, in this context, for the views of other philosophers.
- 11 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Natural Law* (translated by T.M. Knox, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1975), p. 91; p. 484.
- 12 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (translated by M.J. Inwood, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2018), §187.
- 13 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (ed. Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §47.
- 14 Hegel, "Philosophy of Right", §70 Z.
- 15 Hegel, "Natural Law", p. 91; p. 484.
- 16 Georg Simmel argued that if we lived eternally, life would probably remain undifferentiatedly fused with its values and contents and that death enables

- us to distinguish and recognise the values embodied in our lives. Death is like the full stop that shapes, as well as concludes, a sentence. Simmel's view is reminiscent of Hegel's remark, quoted in (d) earlier: 'the individual who, after a long succession of disconnected experiences, concentrates himself into a single completed shape, and has raised himself out of the unrest of the accidents of life into the calm of simple universality' (PS §451).
- 17 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, volume III* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 104f; (ibid. volume II), p. 312f.
  - 18 Georg W. F. Hegel, "Aesthetics", vol. II, p. 1089; vol. I, p. 391.
  - 19 Georg W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art* (trans. T.M. Knox, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, vol. I), p. 349; 466.
  - 20 Hegel, "Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion", vol. I, p. 311; vol. II, p. 319.
  - 21 In fact Hegel attributes a similar significance to the fear of death and not only to the deliberate risk of death: 'This consciousness [*viz.* that of the bondsman] has felt dread [*Angst*] not about this or that or for this or that moment, but about its whole essence; for it has felt the fear of death.... But this pure universal movement, the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple essence of self-consciousness' (PS§§ 117, 156).
  - 22 This alternative is adopted by Jean-Paul Sartre (*Being and Nothingness*, N.Y.: Philosophical Library, 1956, pp. 233ff; 288ff.). In part owing to Hegel's influence, Sartre presents relations between people as generally conflictual, a view he summarised as 'L'enfer, c'est les autres' ('Hell is other people'). However, Hegel himself does not take this view of others in general. See also Richard Norman, *Hegel's Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* (Brighton: Sussex University Press, 1976), p. 46ff.
  - 23 Hegel, "Natural Law", p. 93, 99ff; 486, 494ff.
  - 24 Hegel, Georg W. F., *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* (online, Gutenberg books, 1817, vol. III), §396. Here, and elsewhere, Hegel is concerned with the development only of *men*, namely, humans of the male gender, and not of women. Despite his congenial relations with his wife and with other women, and despite his love of Sophocles's *Antigone*, he was immune to the burgeoning feminism of the Enlightenment. I have tried to use gender-neutral terminology as far as possible, although not in translations of Hegel's own words, where it would distort his thought, and not where it would produce ludicrous results, as for example in my discussion of the life-and-death combat.
  - 25 Hegel, "Encyclopedia", vol. III, §432 Z.
  - 26 I capitalise the word *State* when it designates a political entity (the German is *Staat*), in contrast to 'state' in the sense of 'condition' (the German is *Zustand*). Thus the 'state of nature' is not a State, although we might speak of the 'state, i.e. condition, of society'.
  - 27 Cf. PS §455 and Hegel, "Philosophy of Right", §324.
  - 28 The reference is to Kant's *Perpetual Peace*. Although he advocated perpetual peace among the European nations, Kant was not unaware of the benefits of warfare in the past (Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 87ff) or of 'the danger that the vitality of mankind may fall asleep' in a condition of perpetual peace (Kant, "Toward Perpetual Peace", p. 14).
  - 29 Hegel, "Philosophy of Right", §324; G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 59f, 114f.
  - 30 Hegel, "Philosophy of Right", §328, cf. also §325.
  - 31 Hegel, "Aesthetics", vol. II, p. 1089; vol I, p. 391; PS §§455f.
  - 32 E.g. Kojève, "Introduction", p. 548: 'Or ce n'est qu'en prenant conscience de sa finitude, et donc de sa mort, que l'homme prend vraiment conscience de



- soi.' Here Kojève says only that finitude entails death, but it is reasonable to assume that he also believed that death entails finitude. The equation of mortality and finitude is challenged by Sartre (*Being and Nothingness* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 546; 630f.)
- 33 Hegel, "Encyclopedia", vol. II, §269ff; vol. III §386 Z.
  - 34 Hegel, "Encyclopedia", vol. I §108Z; Georg W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, translated by A.V. Miller (London: Allan & Unwin, 1969), p. 371, 461f.
  - 35 Hegel, "Philosophy of Right", §178.
  - 36 Hegel, "Philosophy of Right", § 151 Z. Cf. Hegel, "Encyclopedia", vol. III, §396Z.
  - 37 In a letter to T.H. Huxley, of 2nd December 1892, Charles Darwin wrote: "if my view is ever to be generally adopted, it will be by young men growing up and replacing the old workers" (accessed online at <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk>).
  - 38 It is important to remember that even someone who was, in fact, immortal could not know that they were immortal by natural means. However long one has lived so far, it is always possible that one will die at some time or other. Conversely, signs of ageing are a good indication that one's death is forthcoming, although the Greek myth of Tithonus—who was granted immortality but without eternal youth—shows that they are not a logically infallible indication.
  - 39 Plato believed in human immortality and, quite consistently, extended this gift to non-human animals, but Christians and secularists have not followed him in this. See for example Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (London: Wiley, 2008).
  - 40 See for example J.M.E. McTaggart, *Human Immortality and Pre-existence* (London: Arnold, 1916) and H.H. Price, *Thinking and Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953)
  - 41 Kojève, "Introduction", p. 537.
  - 42 Hegel, "Aesthetics", vol. I, p. 355, 474.
  - 43 The dead may, however, take up too much space for our comfort. There is often a shortage of burial plots, and Oxford colleges often have difficulty in finding an appropriate place for portraits of their eminent deceased members.
  - 44 Cf. David Hume, *Essays on Suicide and on the Immortality of the Soul*, London: Basil, 1783), p. 27: 'But if any purpose of nature be clear, we may affirm, that the whole scope and intention of man's creation, so far as we can judge by natural reason, is limited to the present life. With how weak a concern from the original inherent structure of the mind and passions, does he ever look farther? What comparison either for steadiness or efficacy, betwixt so floating an idea, and the most doubtful persuasion of any matter of fact that occurs in common life'.
  - 45 Georg W.F. Hegel, *Frühe theologische Schriften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 187, p. 196, p. 279, p. 288f; Hegel, "Philosophy of Religion", vol. II, p. 213; vol. I, p. 85f.
  - 46 Hegel, "Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion", vol. II, p. 110f; vol. I, p. 461) There are, however, also secular reasons for believing that we have obligations to the dead, such as to keep promises made to them while they were alive and to publish their *Nachlass*. See for example Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (London: Cato, 1979) and Daniel Goldstick, "The Welfare of the Dead", *Philosophy* 63 (1988), pp. 111–113).
  - 47 Hegel, "Theologische Schriften", p. 297f, 414f.
  - 48 Hegel, "Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion", vol. II, p.213; p. 86.
  - 49 Hegel, "Theologische Schriften", p. 154f, 157, 205, 206.

- 50 Hegel, "Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion", vol. I, p. 79f; p. 95. Cf. also p. 314f; p. 322.
- 51 For Solomon (Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel: A Study of G. W. F. Hegel's 'Phenomenology of Spirit'*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) Hegel is an atheist. For more nuanced views, see for example Robert C. Whittemore, "Hegel as Panentheist", in *Studies in Hegel. Tulane Studies in Philosophy*, vol 9. (Dordrecht: Springer, 1960); Peter Singer, *Hegel: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.196ff, and Michael Inwood, *Hegel* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. xviff.
- 52 Hegel, "Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion", vol. I, p. 79f; vol. II, p. 268. Cf. vol. III, p. 302; vol. II, p. 495.

## 8 “Heroism Without Fate, Self-Consciousness Without Alienation”

### Antigone, Trust and the Narrative Structure of Spirit

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The recent turn of philosophical attention to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* has emphasized above all a set of textual and interpretive questions that have still not been fully addressed. Hegel’s accomplishment in the *Phenomenology* is a work that has been compared for its formal and stylistic innovation to such philosophically creative achievements as Plato’s dialogues, Nietzsche’s aphorisms and Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*, yet there has emerged within the scholarly community perhaps even less interpretive agreement about the admittedly *sui generis* structure of the *Phenomenology* than is the case with these points of comparison.<sup>1</sup>

While there is now a wider acknowledgment that the *Phenomenology* must be viewed in light of its having an essentially *narrative* structure,<sup>2</sup> the understanding of this narrativity has been a matter of much dispute. Josiah Royce’s well-known remark that the *Phenomenology* could in fact be understood to have been structured as a form of the classic *Bildungsroman* has been frequently cited, despite the significant differences between the *Phenomenology* and other works of the *Bildungsroman* genre.<sup>3</sup> More broadly, however, the essential concerns of literary modernity associated with the rise of the novelistic form in general have been linked with good reason to the structure of the *Phenomenology*.<sup>4</sup>

There was a time when attempts within the scholarly literature to link the *Phenomenology*’s distinctive narrative structure to specific literary forms and narrative practices might justifiably have been accused of free associationism. Despite the richness of allusion to narrative figures and texts that he draws into the portraits of shapes of consciousness, Hegel, after all, uses only a handful of proper names within the work, and while several of those names—Antigone’s perhaps above all—have started a small scholarly industry, the more allusive character of potential references in the work has been found more problematic. Moreover, Hegel’s practice with respect to the quotation of such sources has also drawn questions, since many of Hegel’s quotations are drawn indirectly as paraphrasals, and even the several clearly attributable quotations (in addition to Sophocles’s *Antigone*, perhaps most memorably those from Goethe’s *Faust* and the concluding couplet from Schiller’s *Die Freundschaft*) all involve interesting alterations on Hegel’s part.

The narrative character of Spirit's development has come to the fore again especially in the recent *Phenomenology* interpretation of Robert Brandom, who, if he is less drawn to the term *narrative* itself, nonetheless sees in the crucial chapter on Spirit a "history of normative structures" that moves from "traditional" to modern normative modes, culminating in the possibility of a new age of recognitively successful practices. Brandom's account emphasizes a crucial relation between an *initially tragic* experience of action (Antigone's burial of her brother), followed by the rise of *irony and alienated modernity*, with a final consummation in the recognitive acts of *confession and forgiveness*.

Brandom sees the overall goal associated with Spirit's narrative development across these normative dimensions as having a dual structure that, in the spirit of Hegelian *Aufhebung*, both negates and preserves something from the two key ancient and modern moments involved: he summarizes this goal, on one hand, in terms of "*the heroism of traditional agency*, without its accompanying tragic subjection to *fate*" and, on the other hand, in terms of "*the individual self-consciousness achieved by modernity*, without its accompanying *alienation*."<sup>5</sup> While the larger character of Brandom's narrative bears important resemblances to Hegel's—in general, in its retrospective and recollective character and, more particularly, in beginning with an identifiably tragic moment that is left behind in favor of a set of more adequate recognitive practices—it is important to compare the determinate steps of this narrative closely to Hegel's own in order to see what interpretive differences there are between the two narratives.

This chapter offers an examination of Brandom's narrative of the history of the normative structures in Spirit, with a particular eye on the development of three related claims that emerge within his reading of Antigone and its broader context as creative adoptions of (or adaptations from) Hegelian concepts:

1. Brandom's claim that Antigone represents (or is an avatar of) the structures of premodern *Sittlichkeit*
2. His claim about the nature of "heroic" responsibility that emerges from an examination of agency within the context of premodern *Sittlichkeit*
3. His claim about the broader narrative structure that is to be traced in the development from this heroic notion of responsibility to the recognitive practices of confession and forgiveness

## 8.1 The Deed at the Beginning: Brandomian and Hegelian Construals of Antigone and the "Unwritten" Laws of Immediate *Sittlichkeit*

The broad strokes of Brandom's tripartite narrative of Spirit's development are clear enough in outline. The initial phase, represented by the immediate *Sittlichkeit* of the first section of Spirit, is one in which agents

are “heroic” in the Brandomian sense that they identify “expansively” with their “whole deed” in a way that does not yet have the narrower intentionality implicit in modern subjectivity (i.e., the notion of subjectivity which acknowledges, as in Kantian moral willing, only what the agent knows or intends in their action). In a second phase, there is an alienation coordinate with the rise of modern subjectivity, as sketched in the middle section of *Spirit* (Culture). And finally, there is what Brandom calls “*Sittlichkeit* in a new form,” whereby “some version” of the initial heroic conception of agency “is indeed part of the mature, postmodern, mediated *Sittlichkeit* that Hegel envisages,” one characterized by cognitive structures that Brandom adopts from the end of the *Spirit* chapter—namely, confession and forgiveness, both part of a general attitude that he calls trust (ST 472, 476).

Brandom takes immediate *Sittlichkeit* to be “the authority of normative statuses over normative attitudes” (ST 474). He emphasizes (correctly) that participants in *sittlich* practices do not simply conform to governing norms but “*identify* with the norms implicit in the practices they share” (ST 475; emphasis mine). Moreover, he argues that such identification (following his reading of the master/slave chapter) requires *risk and sacrifice* on the part of *sittlich* agents.

Brandom reads Hegel’s appropriation of Antigone in this context as an “allegory” of immediate *Sittlichkeit*. His account of Antigone’s role within Hegel’s description of the initial moment of immediate *Sittlichkeit* in the opening section of Hegel’s *Spirit* chapter (“*Der wahre Geist. Die Sittlichkeit*”) begins by noticing the allegorical role that she plays—similar, he suggests, to other of Hegel’s allegories but in this case with a more explicit narrative interpretation.<sup>6</sup>

As Brandom puts it, “participants in *sittlich* practices ... identify with something larger and more encompassing than just their own individual attitudes. They identify with the norms implicit in the practices they share.” In Antigone’s case, as Hegel’s initial citation of her famous lines from Sophocles at the conclusion of the Reason chapter emphasizes, the norms identified with are “unwritten and infallible laws of the gods,” which are “not of yesterday or today, but everlasting, / Though where they came from, none of us can tell”:

They are. If I inquire after their origin and confine them to the point whence they arose, then I have transcended them; for now it is I who am the universal, and they are the conditioned and limited. If they are supposed to be validated by my insight, then I have already denied their unshakeable intrinsic being, and regard them as something which, for me, is perhaps true, but also is perhaps not true. Ethical disposition consists just in sticking steadfastly to what is right, and abstaining from all attempts to move or shake it, or derive it.<sup>7</sup>

(PS § 437)

In Brandom's view, a *sittlich* agent's relation to the norms is therefore "one of *passive acknowledgment* of their bindingness: obedience, and shame and guilt for disobedience.... This subjection of subjective attitudes to objective norms is sacrifice of what is particular to what is universal, hence identification."<sup>8</sup> Hegel's Antigone, much like Sophocles's, is not shown in deliberation but has from the start an *Entschiedenheit* or "decidedness" about what she must do. (In her initial conversation with her sister, she is clear without equivocation about what Creon's order means for her action, and when she is caught and brought before Creon, she says abruptly and directly: "I did it and I don't deny it."<sup>9</sup>)

The chief mistake of this immediate form of *Sittlichkeit*, Brandom argues, is the identification of the *normative and the natural* (ignoring attitude-dependence not only on the side of the *force* of the norms but also on the side of *content*, since norms are intelligible as determinately contentful only in virtue of their being caught up in practices of adjudicating competing claims of materially incompatible commitments and entitlements).<sup>10</sup> The identification of normative and natural means that certain natural properties (in this case, biological gender) are regarded as having fundamental normative roles. In Antigone's world, this identification means that her decidedness with respect to the need for the family to bury one of its members is opposed by the political power of the city to differentiate between those who attack and defend the city. Her actions on behalf of the family are thus opposed by those who represent the city—in this case, her uncle Creon.

The identification Antigone and Creon each have for family and city respectively makes them what Brandom calls "avatars" of these larger "laws"—"decisively identifying with and acting for one institutional aspect of the normative community" (or, as Hegel puts it in a slightly different way, their actions are a result of the ethical *pathos* by which each is governed). The conflict that emerges is the "grain of destruction" for the harmonious ethical world that they inhabit. *Polis* and family are "the two normative centers from which potentially conflicting demands can arise." In this case, Brandom's account emphasizes how crucial the family's role in burial is within this harmonious world—precisely as an action converting the mere "happening" of death as a natural event into something that allows the recognition implicit in human action.<sup>11</sup>

While Brandom's account is right about the need to differentiate ancient Greek notions of the relation between normative status and attitudes, his reading fails to acknowledge the complexity of Hegel's understanding of immediate *Sittlichkeit* ("ethical life") and of his understanding of Antigone as an agent within that *sittlich* context. While it is true that Hegel emphasizes Antigone's immediate connection to burial as family duty, this immediacy does not thereby simply make her (or Creon) the mere "avatar" of family or *polis* in the sense of an agent who is simply passively obedient to the relevant norms.

While Antigone appeals to universal “unwritten and infallible” laws of the gods requiring the burial of family members, it is not clear that one should construe such an appeal in terms that involve only normative statuses while ignoring the relevance of subjectivity and particularity. For one thing, there is a clear expression of differing subjective attitudes within the normative territory that Sophocles explores: Antigone’s sister Ismene does not see the same necessity that her sister does for burying the brother if it contradicts usual expectations for feminine action within Greek patriarchal society. Creon’s son Haemon articulates a similar alternative to action on behalf of what is required in this context by the “human” law of governmental action. And Antigone herself, as Sophocles and Hegel both indicate, expresses clearly after her action an awareness that it is also not impossible that the gods (despite her own decidedness that this was “Zeus’ law”) may not be on her side.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, to understand the normative force of the burial law for a family member, one must also understand (as Sophocles makes clear) a range of possible attitudes consistent with understandings of what is required in the normative framework of immediate *Sittlichkeit*. It is difficult to construe Antigone as a merely passive avatar in the context either of Sophocles’s play or Hegel’s portrayal of her.

Hegel moreover takes with great seriousness an aspect of the subjective side of Antigone’s construal of her normative situation that is often neglected even by otherwise careful readers of Sophocles. In her final speech before going to the tomb, Antigone gives a remarkable account of the reason that there could have been for her no other possible action in this instance. The understanding of the “law” that she has upheld is now given in terms that may sound narrower than the original appeal to the eternal and “unwritten” laws:

Had I had children or their father dead, I’d let them moulder.... One husband gone, I might have found another, or a child from a new man in first child’s place; but with my parents hid away in death, no brother, ever, could spring up for me.<sup>13</sup>

Hegel’s presentation of Antigone is remarkably attentive to these lines within the speech, despite their controversial status: although some readers, including Goethe, have argued that the lines cannot be authentic, they turn out to be essential to Hegel’s depiction of Antigone—in particular, what he saw as the crucial importance of the brother–sister relation.

Hegel’s reading of this remarkable speech animates his discussion in the *sittliche Welt* section of the special relation between sister and brother. For a woman in the immediate world of ethical spirit, the cognitive potentials of all other relations involve either desire (her husband) or transience (children or parents): only with the brother is the recognition at the level of the “individual self,” and hence, “[t]he loss of the brother ... is irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest” (PS § 457).

One of the striking facets of Antigone's *sittlich* situation, in Hegel's view, then, is the peculiar vulnerability Antigone has—precisely in her role as a sister toward a brother, who represents her most important connection to the *public* side of the ethical world. And since the perspective she has as sister is, as Hegel further characterizes it, the “highest intuition” (*höchste Abndung*) of *sittlich* connection within this world, both the risk she runs and the tragic consequences of her deed represent a threat to the trust that she has in the *sittlich* order.

Antigone's articulation of the rather complicated “law” of familial connection she sees as relevant for understanding her duty to bury her brother—and Hegel's insistence on this passage as crucial for his own interpretation—suggest that her role in *Phenomenology of Spirit* is not (vs. Brandom) one of being passively a mere “avatar” of immediate *Sittlichkeit*. To understand better the differences between Hegelian and Brandomian narratives, however, it is important to understand more clearly the distinct notion of responsibility Hegel and Brandom see as connected with immediate *Sittlichkeit*. The following section will explore Brandom's critical distinction between “expansive” and “narrower” senses of responsibility-taking in light of another crucial passage in Hegel's reading of Antigone.

## 8.2 Heroic Responsibility (With and Without Tragic Fate)

A second key claim of Brandom's reading concerns the notion of responsibility in play within the heroic context of *Sittlichkeit*. As he argues, the two sides of the traditional conception are, on one hand, the “heroic aspect”—that one “takes responsibility for the whole deed” (Hegel's conception of *Tat*)—and, on the other hand, the tragic aspect—that one “actually has authority only over what one intends and can foresee” (what Hegel terms *Handlung*).<sup>14</sup> How does Antigone exemplify these aspects of responsibility?

For Hegel, the key passage of Sophocles's *Antigone* concerning responsibility—one that serves as the practical fulcrum of his account as a whole—plays little role in Brandom's account: the much-discussed line of Antigone's that Hegel translates “because we suffer, we acknowledge that we erred” (*weil wir leiden, anerkennen wir, dass wir gefehlt*).<sup>15</sup> Given the importance of this line to Hegel's consideration of responsibility within ancient *Sittlichkeit*—and the evident hermeneutical selectivity that Hegel employs with respect to it—it is worth looking at this passage and its possible relevance for Brandom's account in some detail.

As Hegel presents it, Antigone's line appears to involve a recognition that her act in burying her brother involves guilt or error, but this stands at odds with most readers of Sophocles's heroine. The line that Hegel quotes is in fact part of a more complicated dual conditional that appears within Antigone's long final speech in the play, as she is about to be taken



off to the tomb. This speech opens as she imagines the connection she will have after death with her brother, father, and sister and then turns to the punishment Creon is dealing her:

ἀλλ' εἰ μὲν οὖν τάδ' ἐστὶν ἐν θεοῖς καλὰ,  
παθόντες ἄν ξυγγοῖμεν ἡμαρτηκότες·  
εἰ δ' οἶδ' ἁμαρτάνουσι, μὴ πλείω κακὰ  
πάθοιεν ἢ καὶ δρῶσιν ἐκδίκως ἐμέ.

Should the gods think that this is righteousness,  
in suffering I'll see my error clear.  
But if it is the others who are wrong  
I wish them no greater punishment than mine.<sup>16</sup>

In Sophocles's play, this conditional claim is actually an assertion of Antigone's confidence that what she is doing is correct ("the wise will know my action is right," as she says elsewhere in the speech). As the classicist Richard Jebb put it about these lines,

[t]he gods are allowing her to perish. But it does not follow that they approve of her doom: for they are sometimes slow in punishing wrong. Hence the dilemma.... (1) If the gods approve of my doom, then, after suffering it, I shall become conscious (in the other world) that I have sinned. (2) But if they disapprove of it, and regard Creon as the sinner, then they will punish him at last.<sup>17</sup>

In Sophocles's version, then, despite Creon's actions and her seeming isolation, Antigone's insistence is that *if* the gods actually should think this is righteousness, her suffering will make that clear. She has acted on the divine law as she understands it—with the particular emphasis on the obligation to bury her remaining brother—and the unapologetic character of the speech resonates with other aspects of the Sophoclean character's portrayal: her immediate readiness from the very first lines of the play to perform the burial, as well as her immediate ownership of the deed ("I say I did it, and I don't deny it").<sup>18</sup>

In that regard, the context of Sophocles's speech as a whole reiterates Hegel's sense that this appears as a conflict not between duty and duty, or even between duty and passion, but rather between duty and a reality that cannot be recognized (*eine unglückliche Collision der Pflicht nur mit der rechtlosen Wirklichkeit*, PS § 466)—in Antigone's case, Creon's claiming to have an authority he does not (he appears to her, Hegel says, as "only the violence of human caprice," while she appears to him as "only the self-will and disobedience of the individual who insists on being his own authority").

Why, then, does Hegel turn his interpretive focus not on the decided and unrepentant Antigone who still expresses a trust that her conviction

will, despite her doubts, ultimately be honored as right (i.e., the perspective evident from reading the speech as a whole with the dual conditional included) but rather on an Antigone who would regard her deeds from the more confessional line that he selects and translates as he does ("because we suffer, we acknowledge that we erred")? One clue to the importance of this selected line in Hegel's account can be seen in considering it in light of the Brandomian narrative of Spirit's development involving the retention of the "whole" of heroism's connection to action—its *Tat* as well as its *Handlung*, its consequences as well as the narrower focus on what is intended. Although Hegel renders Sophocles's line in causal terms (*weil wir leiden ...*), the translation of the participle *pathontes* as "*in suffering*" suggests a more intimate relationship between what an agent might *suffer or undergo* as a consequence of a deed and her act of responsibility-taking (what together in Sophocles's text is expressed by the verb of recognition, *sugnoimen*, and the perfect participle *hēmartēkotes*). Self-acknowledged consequences of an action for which an agent takes responsibility in Brandom's "expansive" sense need not be viewed as something alien to the agent (is, in other words, not some *external fate*), provided it is experienced as something that the agent directly connects to the action in a way that enables the recognition of it *as hers* (this is the meaning of *anagnorisis* in the Sophoclean sense and *Anerkennung* in Hegel's).

Hegel's Antigone might, in other words, be understood—precisely in this moment of recognition and confession—as a more general figure of what Brandom sees as Hegelian *retrospectivity* in general.<sup>19</sup> This seems to be the sense for Hegel's construal of *Schuld* or guilt as an awareness that can be articulated by an agent with respect to what they have encountered in the "expansive" set of consequences of their deed:

The accomplished deed completely alters its point of view [i.e., the point of view of the more "complete" *sittlich* consciousness represented by Antigone]; the very performance of it declares that what is *ethical* must be *actual* [*die Vollbringung spricht es selbst aus, dass was sittlich ist, wirklich sein müsse*].... The ethical consciousness must, on account of this actuality and on account of its deed, acknowledge its opposite as its own actuality, must acknowledge its guilt [*Das sittliche Bewusstsein muss sein Entgegengesetztes um dieser Wirklichkeit willen, und um seines Tuns willen, als die seinige, es muss seine Schuld anerkennen*]. (470)<sup>20</sup>

As we have noticed, however, Brandom does not comment on this aspect of Hegelian retrospectivity in Antigone's responsibility-taking but instead focuses on the "expansive" side of action as it is encountered by Oedipus: "Oedipus *is* a parricide; he has committed that crime, even though he did not know that the man he killed in anger was his father." (ST 489) Hegel

also discusses Oedipus in this section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but then develops a sharp contrast between the modes of recognition and responsibility-taking he sees in the father and daughter (again, a point that does not get taken up in Brandom's commentary). Antigone, Hegel argues, is, in fact, a more aware *sittlich* agent than Oedipus:

The ethical consciousness [Antigone's] is more complete, its guilt more inexcusable, if it knows *beforehand* the law and the power which it opposes, if it takes them to be violence and wrong, to be ethical merely by accident, and, like Antigone, knowingly commits the crime.

(PS § 470)

What does Hegel mean that Antigone has a "more complete" [*vollständiger*] *sittlich* consciousness and a purer [*reiner*] sense of guilt than Oedipus? And why might Brandom have chosen to focus in his transition to the "narrower" (*Handlung*-confined) view of responsibility on Oedipus rather than his daughter?

Although Hegel emphasizes the importance of the "expansive" sense of responsibility-taking he sees in the individual line he selects from Antigone's speech, his account of her in his discussion of immediate *Sittlichkeit* recognizes the developing sense of narrower responsibility-taking that characterizes the rest of that final speech in its context. As we have seen in the previous section, for example, he is clear that Antigone understands the (presumably more general) requirement for burial in decisively personal terms concerning her brother, and he also emphasizes the opposite point of the dual conditional (i.e., what is suppressed in his emphasis on taking on guilt for the deed), that Creon will suffer "no more injury" than he has inflicted (§472).

Antigone's "more complete" consciousness for Hegel, in other words, is one that involves *both* of the Brandomian sides of her action: on one hand, he understands her as taking on the "expansive" sense that is emphasized in the line recognizing her guilt, but, on the other hand, Hegel recognizes that she is an agent who (in J. M. Bernstein's words) must be regarded as "protomoral" in a way—in that she "sets herself ethically apart from her immediate ethical others" and stakes herself on a distinctive interpretation of what is required of her in the circumstances she confronts.<sup>21</sup>

This dual-sidedness of Antigone's responsibility-taking immediately poses a question for Hegel's narrative, of course: Can she really be a figure who represents both an "expansive" ancient sense of responsibility-taking and at the same time also in some sense "protomoral"—that is, a medial or transitional figure already inclining toward a world of self-aware subjectivity and the alienation it brings with it? Hegel's answer to this is (in my view) decisively yes, and exploring his reasons for it will lead to a consideration of further differences between Hegel and Brandom concerning the overall narrative structure of *Spirit's* development.

### 8.3 From Confession to Forgiveness: Hegel and Brandom on Trust and the Narrative Structure of Spirit's Development

In comparing Hegel's and Brandom's accounts of the action that opens up the narrative of Spirit and the structure of the narrative which follows it, there are a number of important things to notice. Brandom's interpretation rightly picks up on Hegel's stress on Antigone as a figure for whom agency opens up the world of Spirit in the sense of moving past a nature-bound account of normativity and who does so in a way that emphasizes several facets of action in general, including the expansiveness of action and the importance of a retrospective stance in its construal. As we have seen, however, his narrative notices less subjective tension within the overall account of normativity in immediate *Sittlichkeit* than Hegel's does and puts less emphasis than Hegel's on Antigone's dual role, as expressed both in the pivotal recognition scene in which she offers a confession of guilt for her action in the "expansive" sense but also in Hegel's careful attention to the subjectively self-aware moments of her action that tend in the direction of Brandom's "narrower" sense of responsibility.

If Antigone's speech takes up both the expansive notion of responsibility in the sense of *Tat* (Hegel's selected line, acknowledging wrong because suffering has intervened) and the limited intentionality of *Handlung* (the more nuanced larger speech, clear about where others have gone wrong and what decisions she has had to make, expressing even her distrust of the gods, although she is confident she will be proved correct), she is not only not merely an avatar but also a figure who remarkably serves a dual purpose within Hegel's narrative. She is capable of two sides of the narrative experience that is crucial for Hegel for the development of Spirit: on one side involving loss of the world she is in (this is the expansive side) and for an advance toward a mode of responsibility-taking that is not yet explicitly available to her (the way in which many readers of her simply take her to be a figure of conscience, Hegel's warnings to the contrary).

These differences matter in thinking about how to understand the notions of "heroic" and "tragic" agency that Brandom has employed in his account. As others have commented, the relevant notion of "hero" for Brandom is one that he might be criticized for reading perhaps too closely through the later-to-develop notion of the "hero" that faces the modern "moral valet"—a figure to which Hegel devotes a brief description in the Spirit chapter but which plays an outsized role in Brandom's narrative, with Brandom's linking it to a naturalistic perspective on action and judgment.<sup>22</sup>

But it is also worth asking what larger conclusions can be drawn about the differing narrative structures Hegel and Brandom employ overall. It might be suggested (in rather un-Brandomian fashion) that one of the innovations of Hegel's narrative is that it not only wrestles with the heroic and tragic on their own terms but also uses resources within

those narrative registers to understand what moves the narrative forward toward a notion of self-consciousness that appears in explicit form only later in modernity.

Bernstein, with an eye not only on the “protomoral” aspects of Antigone’s action that we have seen but also on her later impact on the narrative, has suggested in opposition to Brandom an interpretation of Hegel’s narrative of Spirit that draws a strong recapitulatory link between the initial action of the Spirit chapter and the recognitive connection between the confessing agent and the forgiving judge at the end, reading the latter two as “avatars” of Antigone and Creon and hearing the confessor’s lines there (“Ich bin’s”) as echoing Antigone’s own assertion that she performed the burial of her brother (“I did it and I won’t deny it”). (Brandom himself gives some grounds for the connection in his emphasis on Luther’s translation of the forgiveness demanded in the Lord’s Prayer: the *Schuld* that is confessed in the opening moment of Spirit can only be forgiven and reconciled in its final moment when confession has the explicit structure of responsive and responsible forgiveness.)

Bernstein is drawn, as I am, to some narrative elements of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* which do not appear in Brandom’s account—particularly, the sense in which Spirit, engaged in an activity of negation that is also productive of achievement, forms a continuous narrative that is intentionally shaped in a way to offer not just later recollections but actual recapitulations within its narrative structure. Brandom characterizes Antigone and other figures or moments within Spirit as individual punctiform “allegories” or “parables”—a strange move, given his clear construal of Hegel’s interest in the sort of actions that involve larger “processes” (writing a book) as opposed to punctate ones (flipping a switch). (Also strange when one considers that if Hegel valued any figure of speech less highly than the allegory, it was the parable: following the Goethean binary between symbol and allegory, Hegel held, like Schelling, that the Greek gods and heroes like Antigone could not be reduced to allegorical meanings but instead were individual figures who embodied the universals to which they were connected.)

Hegel’s employment of a more continuous narrative structure—one that does not just reduce to individual allegories of experience but also offers a relation between moments that coalesce into a larger succession—opens up possibilities for narrative elements that may be taken to be central to the experience of reading the *Phenomenology of Spirit* but less so to reading *A Spirit of Trust*.

Hegel considers the notion of trust, for example, in a way that frames the entire Spirit account at once both prospectively and retrospectively. Brandom’s discussion of trust is motivated, he suggests, by “Hegel’s use of it to describe what is progressive about faith, despite the cognitive errors for which it stands condemned by the Enlightenment,” and he cites paragraph 549 in this context: “Whomsoever I trust, his certainty

of himself is for me the certainty of myself. I recognize in him my own being-for-self, know that he acknowledges it and that it is for him purpose and essence" (ST 529).

Hegel, by contrast, frames the appearance of the notion of trust within this Enlightenment context in a more complex way within the overall narrative design of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. In particular, Hegel gives his readers both prospective and retrospective accounts of how trust is involved in Spirit's developmental narrative. The first mention of "trust" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* comes in the Reason chapter, paragraphs 355–56 of the section on the "Actualization of Rational Self-Consciousness through its own Activity." In this section, Hegel introduces a dual narrative structure that will, in fact, mark the essential ambiguity in his overall presentation of the appearance of *Sittlichkeit*. The section is an introductory passage to the "Actualization of Rational Self-Consciousness" section as a whole, and begins with Hegel's presentation of the notion of the concrete ethical structure—the "present living Spirit" in a free nation (PS § 352), which Hegel argues is in truth the realization of Reason—and then sets up three moments of individual agency within the context of implicit ethical structure (namely, *Pleasure and Necessity*, *The Law of the Heart and the Frenzy of Self-Conceit*, and *Virtue and the Way of the World*).

Hegel initially presents this ethical structure in terms that remind one of his praise of the ancient city-state and that will indeed be recapitulated in the actual appearance of Spirit in chapter VI: the individual within it "finds his essential character, i.e. his universal and particular nature, expressed," and hence, the "wisest men of antiquity have therefore declared that wisdom and virtue consist in living in accordance with the customs of one's nation" (PS § 352).

Hegel then presents two alternatives: *either* Reason must *withdraw* from this "happy state of having realized its essential character" (PS § 354–55) *or* it has *not yet* realized it (PS § 356). In the first instance, there is for the individual what Hegel calls a "solid unshaken trust" (*ein gediegenes Vertrauen*) but that trust is lost, and the individual, "isolated and on his own," is "now the essence, no longer universal Spirit" and becomes a moment only "as a vanishing quantity" (*nur als verschwindende Quantität*) (PS § 355). In the second case, Spirit is "not yet" realized but "established only as an *inner* essence or as an abstraction" (PS § 356).

The duality implicit in Hegel's discussion of these passages—loss of trust or interiorization/abstraction to the point of vanishing—suggests the important relation (or tension) for Hegel between tradition and modernity: on one hand, the transition to modernity involves a loss of trust and connection to Spirit's unshaken solidity (what Hegel calls *Gediegenheit*) and, on the other hand, an increasing sense of individuality that nonetheless leads to vanishing and dissolution (*Verschwinden*, a

recurring motif in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). Portraying this duality clearly represented a central problem of the narrative of Spirit that plagued Hegel as he wrote the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: how at once to capture each of these two sides. His ultimate strategy was to show both Spirit's emergence from the preceding account of Reason and then, following Spirit's own progression from its initial implicit structure in ancient Greece, to offer a reflective meta-narrative and recapitulation in the Religion chapter.

If the prospective narrative of the Reason chapter takes up this duality in terms of lost trust and disappearing or alienated individuality, the retrospective narrative of the Religion chapter formulates it in explicitly literary narrative terms, as something that has both elements of tragic mourning and comic levity. On one hand,

that tranquil immediate trust in the substance turns back into trust in oneself and into the certainty of oneself. ... The consummation of the ethical sphere in free self-consciousness, and the fate of the ethical world, are therefore the individuality that has withdrawn into itself, the absolute levity of the ethical Spirit which has dissolved within itself all the firmly established distinctions of its stable existence and the sphere of its organically ordered world and being perfectly sure of itself, has attained to unrestrained joyfulness and the freest enjoyment of itself.

(PS § 701)

On the other hand, this levity has a serious side in the "mourning" that is involved in this loss and corresponding alienation from the ethical world:

This simple certainty of Spirit within itself has a twofold meaning: it is a serene, stable existence and settled truth, and also absolute unrest and the passing-away of the ethical order... Since, then, its trust is broken, and the substance of the nation bruised, Spirit, which hitherto mediated the unstable extremes, has now stepped forward as an extreme, that of self-consciousness grasping itself as essence. This is Spirit, inwardly sure of itself, which mourns over the loss of its world, and now out of the purity of self creates its own essence which is raised above the real world.

(PS § 701)

Both the prospective and retrospective narratives of trust that stand on either side of the appearance of Spirit in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* involve, then, a duality: on one hand, a moment of loss or mourning and, on the other hand, a moment of disappearance, irony, or levity. This duality raises a number of important questions about how one characterizes such a duality within the context of a "progressive" narrative.

As we consider now Antigone's appearance within this narrative, two key differences from Brandom's narrative are evident. First, the Hegelian narrative of Spirit's development is non-punctate and continuous: Antigone serves not merely as an allegory for one moment in time or an avatar of one ethical view, but she is, rather, in an important sense an Antigone that is *ours* to claim as well.<sup>23</sup> (Hegel's well-known image of the maiden who hands the fruits of Spirit to a later age is relevant here (PS § 753): not only Antigone but also all the historical figures of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* are in some sense "recollected" already.)

Second, this more continuous narrative appears as if it might be more open to a side of negativity and vulnerability that can go missing in the context of a larger "progressive" developmental narrative: Hegel's narrative allows both for the "mourning of loss" and for a modernity-oriented interiorization that can develop in the direction of disappearance and alienation. His stress on issues like Antigone's vulnerability and the framing of the larger narrative of Spirit's experience of the loss of trust suggests that there might be more possibility in Hegel for the consideration of claims of "mistrust" or "distrust" than in Brandom's narrative.

There is much more to say about both of these aspects of the narrative of Spirit, but in the interest of space, I conclude with one final point about the relation between Hegelian and Brandomian narratives that seems especially relevant given what has been said so far. Brandom talks at the end of his recollection of the Hegelian narrative about the way in which the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a "paradigm instance of what it is a theory of: making a tradition have been about something, and have been a gradual but ultimately successful finding out about it" (ST 632).

Brandom's point about the self-effectuating character of the narrative of Spirit is well-taken, but in Hegel's version, that element of narrative self-discovery requires explicitly the structuring of a further narrative. The scene of confession and forgiveness that ends the narrative of Spirit in the *Phenomenology* opens up immediately to the consideration of Religion, a section that Brandom admittedly does not offer much commentary on, but which explicitly concerns itself at the level of form with structures that we have seen emerge in the course of the Spirit narrative—in particular the relation between the dual elements of (tragic) loss and (comic) interiorization, with a culmination in the language of what Hegel calls in this context "manifest" religion (*offenbare Religion*), in which notions such as guilt, confession and forgiveness are considered from (loosely speaking) a demythologized perspective. But the questions raised by this latter account—including not only Hegel's explicit thematization of the previous narrative's employment of literary and religious narrative itself but also its evidently intimate relation to Hegel's developing systematic project in art, religion, and philosophy—are all issues that deserve more treatment than can be offered in the present space.<sup>24</sup>



## Notes

- 1 Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 1; Robert Pippin, "You Can't Get There from Here": Transition Problems in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 78.
- 2 See, for example, J. M. Bernstein, who claims that "Kantian transcendental necessity" has been replaced "with the necessity of a retrospective narrative" (Bernstein, "Is Brandom a Positivist? Notes on Alienation, Trust, Confession and Forgiveness," in *Reading Brandom: On A Spirit of Trust*, ed. Gilles Bouché [New York: Routledge, 2020], p. 124).
- 3 Josiah Royce, *Lectures on Modern Idealism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), pp. 147–156; on the evaluation of Royce's claim, see Robert Pippin, "Hegelianism as Modernism," *Inquiry* 38.3 (September 1995), p. 315.
- 4 On recent discussions of Hegel in this regard, see Antón Barba-Kay, "What Is Novel in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," *Hegel Bulletin* 29 (2019), pp. 1–24 and Katrin Pahl, *Tropes of Transport. Hegel and Emotion* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012).
- 5 Robert Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology*, p. 31; emphases mine. Further references to this work (ST) by page number in the text.
- 6 On the differences between Brandom's uses of the notion of allegory for his readings of sections of the PhS in ST—and the important differences in Hegel's own understanding of allegory—see Section 8.3.
- 7 Here and in the following citations, I have used (occasionally with emendation) the translation of A. V. Miller, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Bracketed numbers refer to paragraphs of the text.
- 8 ST 479 (emphases mine).
- 9 Sophocles, *Antigone*, line 443. Translation here and in the following reference to Sophocles by Elizabeth Wyckoff in *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Sophocles I*, eds. David Grene and Richmond Latimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).
- 10 ST 479. For Brandom's notion of material (as opposed to formal or logical) incompatibility and its relation to Hegel's notion of determinate negation, see, for example, ST 143.
- 11 Brandom, like Hegel, emphasizes the broader importance of the conversion of happening into deed as the "first deed" within the narrative of Spirit. He does not, however, discuss much the explicitly political issue of the opposing and co-justificatory side of the city's power of war that is equally central to Hegel's account of immediate *Sittlichkeit*.
- 12 Compare, for example, her initial claim that "it was not in my view Zeus [*ou gar ti moi Zeus*]" who made Creon's order [line 450; Wyckoff's translation emended] with the question she raises in her long final speech: "Why in my misery, look to the gods for help? / Can I call any of them my ally?" [921–922].
- 13 Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 905–912.
- 14 ST 491–2.
- 15 PhS 470; Sophocles, *Antigone*, line 926.
- 16 Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 925–928.
- 17 *The Antigone of Sophocles. With A Commentary, Arranged from the Large Edition of Richard C. Jebb*, by E. S. Shuckburgh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), p. 183.

- 18 Sophocles, *Antigone*, line 443.
- 19 Antigone's retrospective stance toward her action raises a set of issues that recent philosophy of narrative, particularly Peter Goldie's notion of narrative perspective, has nicely opened up—something Goldie thought was both true of tragic irony and novelistic narrative, but Hegel already had to be careful about distinguishing these in the narrative structuring of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Peter Goldie, *The Mess Inside: Narrative, Emotion and the Mind* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012]).
- 20 As discussed in the following section, the use of terms like *guilt* and *confession* seems to reach forward in Hegel's narrative to the explicit practices involving confession and forgiveness of *Schuld* at the end of the Spirit chapter. Hegel is quite clear in the *Aesthetics* lectures about differentiating ancient Greek from postclassical worldviews, but he does look with interest on the account of responsibility available in so-called reconciliation plays like *Oedipus at Colonus* where Oedipus can speak—in an extension of the terms of Antigone's *pathontes* and a deliberate mixing of the senses of *Handlung* and *Tat*—of the “*deeds I suffered*” (*erga peponthota*).
- 21 J. M. Bernstein, “Is Brandom a Positivist? Notes on Alienation, Trust, Confession and Forgiveness,” in *Reading Brandom: On A Spirit of Trust*, ed. Gilles Bouché (New York: Routledge, 2020).
- 22 See Terry Pinkard, “Semantic Self-Consciousness,” in *Reading Brandom: On A Spirit of Trust*, ed. Gilles Bouché (New York: Routledge, 2020). The contrast here between an already modernized sense of “hero” available to a figure like the *Kammerdiener* and the ancient sense of the term can also be seen in Hegel's brief discussion in the *Philosophy of Right*, which contrasts the appropriation of what he evidently regards as distinctly ancient notions like “virtue” in post-Revolutionary France.
- 23 This is related to the larger issue of what Karl Ameriks has termed “exemplarity” in the Romantics' view of historical narrative (see Karl Ameriks, *Kantian Subjects: Critical Philosophy and Late Modernity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019], p. 202). Ameriks's account, taken together with the strong fusion of Romantic sources that Hegel uses for the historical inflection of the final paragraphs of the Spirit chapter, suggests another set of questions that might be posed for comparing Hegelian and Brandomian narratives of how confession and forgiveness are reached, for example, what a consideration of a more conflictual and artistic model of critical interpretations (such as that Hegel acknowledges in Schlegel), as opposed to the familiar Brandomian model of judges considering precedents at common law, might yield in thinking about the relation of historical figures and texts.
- 24 As Dean Moyar has argued, Hegel actually encodes into his presentation of the final moments of the Spirit chapter and its connection to Absolute Knowing references not only to the recognition of the larger inferential movement of the Concept that is implied (and hence the explicit structures of the Logic) but also to what he thinks is required by the Spirit narrative in terms of the ultimate development of Absolute Spirit with compacted considerations of this movement's relevance for art, religion and philosophy. See Dean Moyar, “Absolute Knowledge and the Ethical Conclusion of the *Phenomenology*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. D. Moyar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 166–195, here p. 188. While Hegel appears not yet in 1807 to have employed a tripartite structure of Absolute Spirit as the mature *Encyclopedia* does, the passage in which we earlier looked at Hegel's retrospective view of the duality of mourning and levity (PS § 701) announces directly the arrival of what he now calls “Absolute Art.” The relation of the

*Phenomenology of Spirit*'s conclusion to the systematic concerns of the *Logic* and the *Encyclopedia*'s notion of Absolute Spirit is obviously relevant to a fuller consideration of the charge of inferential positivism that Robert Pippin and others have leveled at Brandom (see Pippin's comments on Brandom's earlier *Tales of the Mighty Dead*: "Brandom's Hegel," *European Journal of Philosophy* 13/3 [2005], pp. 381–408).

## 9 Hegel Versus Subjective Duties and External Reasons

### Recent Readings of “Morality” and “Conscience” in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*

*Sebastian Ostritsch*

#### 9.1 Introduction: An “Idiosyncratic Earlier Work”

*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, published in 1807, is undoubtedly one of Hegel’s most influential works. However, its relation to Hegel’s mature system as outlined in his *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* is the topic of a seemingly never-ending debate among Hegelians.

Apart from many differences in content, the difference in method is most striking. The mature system follows what has come to be known as Hegelian dialectics. Instead of being a rigid procedure (like the infamous three-step program of “thesis, antithesis, synthesis”), Hegelian dialectics is highly context-sensitive. It is the process of thinking through a specific concept, a process whereby the thinking through of another concept (the *negation* of the first one) becomes necessary.

The method of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* can also be called broadly dialectical insofar as it involves such a process of thinking through something. However, that which is to be thought through in the *Phenomenology* are “shapes of consciousness” (*Gestalten des Bewusstseins*).<sup>1</sup> More specifically, the method of the *Phenomenology* consists in putting different shapes of consciousness—that is, idealized models of what consciousness believes itself to be, what it takes its object to be, and how it thinks of their relation—to the test. The test concerns the self-consistency of a certain form of consciousness. In other words, the question in every chapter is, Is it possible to conceive of consciousness, its object, and the relationship between those two in the way that the shape of consciousness under scrutiny claims that it is the case?<sup>2</sup> If this is not possible, the very shape of consciousness must be modified, thus leading to a new model of consciousness that, in turn, must be critically explored from within. The truth about consciousness, its object, and the relation between them is found as soon as no such modification is warranted.<sup>3</sup>

To make things even more complicated, about halfway into the *Phenomenology* we are told that from now on we are dealing not only with shapes of consciousness but also with “shapes of a world”

(*Gestalten einer Welt*).<sup>4</sup> This means that we have crossed over from “subjective spirit” to what the mature Hegel would call “objective spirit”, that is, the social reality of self-consciously thinking and willing beings. In the terminology of the *Phenomenology*, however, we have transitioned from “reason” (*Vernunft*) to “spirit” (*Geist*).

With the beginning of the Spirit chapter, the *Phenomenology*—which is ripe with allusions to literature, art, scientific theories, and philosophical positions from the beginning—receives yet another layer of meaning. From this point forward, the reader is confronted with references to historical events, ranging from Greek polity to the French Revolution, and left with the question whether this historical dimension is supposed to be only illustrative or whether it is the very topic itself, that is, whether we have gone from idealized (and therefore timeless) shapes of consciousness to historical shapes of spirits or whether the historical references are there simply as examples of idealized (and therefore timeless) shapes of spirit.

It is certainly due to this rich but often confused and confusing nature of the *Phenomenology* that, shortly before his death, Hegel called it an “idiosyncratic earlier work” (*eigenthümliche frühere Arbeit*) and therefore decided not to revise it for a planned second edition.<sup>5</sup>

What are we, what is any reader of the *Phenomenology* therefore to do with it? One obvious possibility consists in the exploration of the rich tapestry of allusions and references throughout the *Phenomenology*. Another possibility is to look for insights and arguments that promise to be of value to current philosophical debates, regardless of the overall goal of the *Phenomenology*.

It is the latter approach that I am interested in in this chapter. I want to discuss some contemporary readings of the *Phenomenology* that focus on morality (*Moralität*) in general and conscience (*Gewissen*) in particular and that do so in order to reconstruct some of Hegel’s views on two contemporary issues of practical normativity and practical rationality respectively.

The first issue is the possibility of subjective duties. A subjective duty is a duty that is constituted by an agent’s belief in it. Do such duties exist? Christoph Halbig and Dean Moyar have tried to show that Hegel’s treatment of conscience in the *Phenomenology* provides convincing arguments against subjective duties.

The second issue is the possibility of external reasons. The question is if there can be reasons external to an agent in such a manner that they would provide him with a reason to act even though he simply *could not* be motivated by them. Internalists will deny such a possibility. Robert Pippin has famously placed Hegel in the internalist camp and has quoted passages from the Morality chapter of the *Phenomenology* as evidence.

Before dealing with these two issues, I offer an account of the dialectical development of the Morality chapter.

## 9.2 Moral Worldview, Dissemblance, and Conscience

“Morality” is the third segment within the larger Spirit chapter, following segments on ethical life, and the alienation of spirit (*sich entfremdeter Geist*) that is at the same time a process of spiritual formation (*Bildung*). The section on morality—and with it the entire Spirit chapter—is followed by the chapter on religion.

The overall dialectical movement of the Spirit chapter thus starts with the idea of a commonly shared ethical life that is experienced by the individual as fundamental and binding. We then move on to the alienation from ethical life in which the social whole and its norms are experienced by the individual as something that it must emancipate itself from. Finally, morality is presented as the dialectical successor and thus the answer to the problems of the proceeding forms of spirit, that is, ethical life and alienation.

Interestingly, in his mature system, Hegel has more or less reversed this order. In the *Philosophy of Right*, it is ethical life that answers the problems of morality and its final and highest manifestation: conscience.

One of the reasons for this change has to do with a different conception of ethical life. While ethical life in the *Phenomenology* is presented as the ethical life of Greek antiquity, ethical life in the *Philosophy of Right* is the particularly modern form of *Sittlichkeit* that Hegel claimed was (becoming) actual at his own time. The main difference between those two takes on ethical life is that—in contrast to the ethical life of ancient Greece—modern *Sittlichkeit* explicitly recognizes and respects the rights of subjectivity, that is, the right of self-consciousness individuals to satisfy their particular drives and inclinations and the right to gain insight into what their objective duties are.<sup>6</sup> In the *Phenomenology*, it is individual morality and finally the individual’s moral conscience that appears to solve the dialectical inconsistencies of (premodern) ethical life and the alienation of consciousness that arises from it.

How and why then does moral conscience appear in the *Phenomenology*? To answer this, it is best to begin at the start of the Morality chapter. Morality, we are told, is spirit that is certain of itself (*der seiner selbst gewisse Geist*).<sup>7</sup> Hegel explains this as follows: morality is the shape of consciousness which has mastered the opposition between consciousness and its object, that is, the very opposition that has been the reason for the dialectical movement and development of consciousness from the beginning of the *Phenomenology*. Moral consciousness has morality, that is, moral duty, as its object, and it believes this object to be reality. At the same time, it knows that the reality of moral duty is nothing else than the self-awareness of moral consciousness itself. Moral reality is not external to moral consciousness; rather, it is the very substance of moral consciousness itself. Thus, there appears to be no opposition between what moral consciousness takes itself to be and what it takes to be its object.

However, if there really were no such opposition at all, we would have already reached “absolute knowledge” (*absolutes Wissen*) and thus the end of the *Phenomenology*, for absolute knowledge is not the infallible knowledge of everything but knowledge in which the opposition between consciousness and its object has been overcome. Therefore, unsurprisingly, Hegel does detect an opposition within moral consciousness that, at first glance, did not seem to be there.

If we regard moral consciousness as *consciousness*, Hegel argues, there must also exist some object that is external to it. On the one hand, any external object is “meaningless” to moral consciousness because it only regards duty, which is not outside but inside itself, as truly real.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the external objects outside of moral consciousness constitute a world that is independent from moral consciousness, that is, a nonmoral reality. The adequate name for this nonmoral reality is simply “nature”.<sup>9</sup> This relation between the moral reality of moral consciousness and the nonmoral reality of nature results in what Hegel calls “the moral worldview” (*moralische Weltanschauung*).<sup>10</sup>

The moral worldview is plagued by two contradicting attitudes toward nature. On the one hand, it is only duty and the right attitude (*Gesinnung*) toward duty that count for moral consciousness.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, this attitude is empty without a corresponding action, for duty demands the realization of an end. Any individual consciousness that believes itself to be moral consciousness is thus only fully actualized and thereby satisfied when duty is actually fulfilled, that is, when the ends set by duty are realized.<sup>12</sup> The realm within which ends are realized (or not) is nature. Thus, the actuality of moral reality depends on nature which in turn has been defined as an essentially nonmoral reality. Herein lies the basic contradiction of the moral worldview: morality is supposed to be everything, nature nothing, and yet it is nature on which the fate of morality hinges.

The moral worldview attempts to overcome this contradiction with the help of postulates that are supposed to harmonize morality and nature. The first postulate claims morality to be the ultimate end of nature. According to the second postulate, the overcoming of all sensuous influence on the will, that is, the moral purification of the will, is the final end of moral consciousness itself.<sup>13</sup> In both cases, however, the harmony is never actually realized but rather always pushed toward “the dark distance of infinity” (*dunkle Ferne der Unendlichkeit*).<sup>14</sup> This infinity is always receding, never actual, it is what Hegel in his *Science of Logic* calls “bad infinity” (*schlechte Unendlichkeit*).<sup>15</sup> The moral worldview is thus characterized by two contradicting statements it is committed to due to its own understanding of itself and nature: (1) Moral consciousness is something actual. (2) Moral consciousness is not actual. Or in what is essentially the same contradiction, (1) there is a moral reality as something *actualized* (i.e., outside of consciousness and thought), and (2) there is no moral reality as something *actualized* (i.e., outside of consciousness and thought).

As always with Hegelian dialectics, contradictions such as this are not affirmed or celebrated. Rather, they are the reason to continue thinking in order to finally overcome them. In the case of moral consciousness said contradiction motivates the transition to the second section of the Morality chapter, which is called “dissemlance” (*Verstellung*).

What does it mean that moral consciousness is engaging in dissemlance? Put simply, it means that the only way to uphold the moral worldview despite its inherent contradiction is to fake it. Moral consciousness is fake insofar as it professes the moral worldview yet cannot *really* mean what it says: moral reality is supposed to be actual, but it cannot *actually* be actual because the harmony between morality and nature is a mere postulate. Therefore, the supposed actuality of the moral realm must be postponed indefinitely. The actualization of moral reality is confined to a future that can never be reached, only imagined. At the same time, however, moral consciousness does and must *act* according to duty. Thereby, it performatively contradicts its own postulate that morality cannot be realized in the here and now. To act on duty presupposes the conviction that the very ends dictated by duty can, in principle, be realized.<sup>16</sup>

However, moral consciousness cannot be serious about acting because the true end of its moral actions is to achieve the complete moralization of nature, that is, to make the law of morality the law of nature. To actually achieve this goal would mean the end of individual actions and individual moral consciousness. For a world fully moralized would do away not only with the necessity but also with the possibility of moral action as it is envisioned by the moral worldview.<sup>17</sup> Moral consciousness is thus either lying to itself or to everyone else (or both) if it claims that its actions are intended to fully realize morality as nature’s final end.

The very same dishonesty is required of moral consciousness regarding the nature that is inside or part of it, that is, its “inclinations and drives” (*Neigungen und Triebe*).<sup>18</sup> As *moral* consciousness is interested only in duty, it must claim to want to overcome them. But truly overcoming them would be the end of individual moral consciousness, for such consciousness is defined by the very activity of fighting against one’s inclinations and drives in the name of pure duty.<sup>19</sup> The moral purification of consciousness itself is therefore imagined as a goal that can only be attained through an infinite progression, which, of course, means that it can never *actually* be attained.<sup>20</sup> Complete moral purity is a pipe dream.

Hegel continues to trace the dialectics of dissemlance in further detail. For the purposes of this chapter, it suffices to sum up the main point of the section on dissemlance as follows: moral consciousness that adheres to the moral worldview cannot get what it wants, because getting what it wants would imply its own end. Therefore, it is forced to operate with dissemlance, which means that it is essentially forced to lie to others and itself. Once consciousness itself realizes that its moral worldview comes with necessary dissemlance, it cannot continue like this because



otherwise, dissemblance would become full-on hypocrisy, and consciousness would cease to be a *moral* one.<sup>21</sup>

Recoiling from the prospect of becoming hypocritical, moral consciousness becomes “pure conscience” (*reines Gewissen*).<sup>22</sup> Conscience abandons the basic opposition between a moral realm of pure duty and a realm of nature in which morality was to become actual. Instead, it declares itself to be both at once: the immediate knowledge of duty, that is, of what is right and therefore must be done and, at the same time, the immediate realization of this moral knowledge through action. Conscience is, in Hegel’s words, “a *moral* essence that is *self-actualizing* in an immediate unity, and the action is immediately a *concrete* moral shape”.<sup>23</sup> Conscience is thus the intuitive, nondiscursive knowledge of itself as that what ought to be done and the immediate realization of this very knowledge.<sup>24</sup> There is no sense in trying to engage conscience with reasons about possible other duties that are contrary to the one it is certain of.<sup>25</sup> Its only practical reason for an action is its own conviction that is obligated to perform that very action.<sup>26</sup> There is no access to conscience from the outside. Instead, the conviction that something ought to be done *is* the very duty itself: “For the *essence* of the action, duty, consists in conscience’s *conviction* about it”.<sup>27</sup>

All considerations about moral purity and the possible disharmony between the moral and the natural realm, considerations that have defined and haunted the moral worldview, are pushed aside as irrelevant by conscience. It does what it is convinced of, because for it, conviction and duty are one and the same. For conscience, duty exists only as something that it recognizes as such. It only exists in “the spiritual element of being recognized”.<sup>28</sup> Yet, at least from its own perspective, conscience is not adhering to any sort of moral subjectivism. On the contrary, in acting according to its own conviction, it is convinced to be performing what is *objectively* right, because duty is something universal, that is, that which all self-conscious subjects must recognize.<sup>29</sup>

However, it does not follow from the universality of duty that there is the same specific duty for everyone in a given situation. On the contrary, according to the conception of conscience, the specific *content* of duty depends solely on the conviction of a particular conscience. Thus, paradoxically, two individuals might disagree about what duty demands of them in a given situation, and yet both might act according to duty, for there is no duty as such independently of what an individual conscience is convinced of.

This view of conscience relative duty makes it impossible to identify a truly objective duty, that is, a *specific* duty in a given situation that must be universally recognized. This has descriptive as well as normative reasons.

First of all, acting on conscience means acting in a given situation, and every situation has its specifics. Truly knowing one’s duty would thus depend on knowing those specifics. But the specifics of any situation are

manifold. The situation is “an absolute multiplicity of circumstances that divides itself infinitely and spreads backwards into its conditions, sideways into its juxtaposition, and forward into its consequences”.<sup>30</sup> Any situation is so rich, so full of specific content, that, merely on a descriptive level, conscience cannot claim to know it in its entirety. Therefore, the absolute certainty of its conviction that defines conscience is thwarted by the very limited knowledge conscience can have of a specific situation.

Second of all, there are normative problems that mirror the descriptive ones. The normative analysis of a situation will typically reveal a “manifold of *duties*” as well.<sup>31</sup> Actually, at this stage of the *Phenomenology*, duties are as manifold as the convictions of different individual consciences. Whatever an individual conscience happens to be convinced of is its duty. Since conscience’s becoming convinced of something is not a rational process based on the weighing of arguments, and since its own self-certainty does not generate any specific content, the content of duty must be the result of pure chance. It is the result of an arbitrary act of will (*Willkür*), an act that depends on whatever determining factors (drives and inclinations) happen to be around and dominant at that time.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, *everything* can be made into an act of duty by conscience. Even an act of cowardice can appear as an act of duty as long as conscience is convinced that it is performing a duty, for example, the duty to sustain one’s own life.<sup>33</sup> Since it is an act of duty (i.e., of what conscience *believes* to be its duty), it demands to be recognized as such by others, even though their conscience might have told them to perform a different, conflicting duty.

Herein lies a fundamental problem for conscience. It demands recognition for what it does out of conviction, but obviously others cannot be coerced to provide such recognition. After all, they are themselves consciences that are only obligated to do what they are convinced of. And since every conscience is enclosed on itself, others have no possibility of knowing, of being certain about someone else’s convictions. Others “thus do not know, whether this conscience is morally good or evil, or rather: not only can they not know this but they must also presume that it is evil”.<sup>34</sup> After all, conscience will disobey and contradict publicly accepted standards of what is good and right in the name of its own conviction to which no else has access.

Since for conscience duty equals its conviction about duty, its actions themselves are only imperfect outward expressions or manifestations of what lies within and what truly counts, that is, one’s inner conviction. The adequate medium for expressing or manifesting one’s inner conviction is therefore not action but language as “the reality of spirit” (*das Dasein des Geistes*).<sup>35</sup> Therefore, conscience demands that it should not be judged by its action but only by its convictions as they are expressed in language.<sup>36</sup> Every other conscience will do the very same: profess its own convictions and demand that they be recognized as convictions of conscience. Within a community of consciences, moral discourse is—as sarcastically

described by Hegel—reduced to the profession of one’s immediate moral convictions, followed by the mutual recognition and assurance of every-one’s moral purity and conscientiousness.<sup>37</sup>

The dialectical development of conscience started with a conscience that manifested its convictions through action and it has progressed to a form of conscience that is reassuring itself and others of its morality through speech. This is the birth of what Hegel calls the “beautiful soul” (*schöne Seele*).<sup>38</sup> The conscience that is a beautiful soul will stay pure by not acting, and it will use this purity to condemn the actions of others as “evil” (*das Böse*) and their attempts to justify their actions by referring to their own conscience as “hypocrisy” (*Heuchelei*).<sup>39</sup> However, the acting conscience will simply return the claim of hypocrisy. For although the beautiful soul claims to be morally pure in its judgment of others, each one of its judgments is also a “positive mental action” (*positive Handlung des Gedankens*) with “a positive content” (*einem positiven Inhalt*).<sup>40</sup> Thus, the other conscience is free to return the judgment by calling the beautiful soul hypocritical and evil.

The way out of this dialectical impasse consists in recognizing that acting on conscience always leaves open the possibility that one’s action is also the expression of one’s own particular motives. The dialectical movement of the chapter on conscience strongly suggests that acting only for duty’s sake, that is, acting dutiful with total disregard for one’s own particular motives, is an illusion. This means two things: First, the acting conscience must acknowledge the inextinguishable possibility of it being evil. Second, the conscience that was ready to judge the acting conscience as evil or hypocritical must stop being self-righteous, its “heart of stone” (*hartes Herz*) must break.<sup>41</sup> The limitations of conscience are finally overcome through acts of mutual forgiveness (*Verzeihung*) and reconciliation (*Versöhnung*).<sup>42</sup> All individuals must learn that not even their acts of conscience can save them from becoming guilty, that is, being egoistic or doing the wrong thing. At the same, however, they come to realize that—through forgiveness and reconciliation—the “wounds of spirit heal without leaving any scars”.<sup>43</sup> Individuals that, because of their conflicting consciences, know themselves to be absolutely distinct thus realize that, at the same time, they are one and the same in partaking in a universal self-consciousness.<sup>44</sup>

The practice of forgiveness and reconciliation through which distinct individuals come to realize that, at the same time, they are one and same universal self-consciousness is called religion. The dialectical movement of conscience thus results in religious consciousness. This means that, in the *Phenomenology*, the normative problems that arise from conscience are not solved by a more elaborate ethical theory but rather by religion.

### 9.3 Hegel Versus Subjective Duties

I now turn to two readings of Hegel’s chapter on conscience in the *Phenomenology*—one by Christoph Halbig and one by Dean Moyar—that

are interested in Hegel's understanding of duty.<sup>45</sup> They both draw on the contemporary distinction between subjective and objective duties.<sup>46</sup>

A subjective duty for a certain action would be a duty that was generated by the agent's belief that he is obligated to perform that action. According to this view, I would have a subjective duty to spend time with my child simply because of the fact that I *believe* that I should do it. Of course, according to such a view, I would also have a subjective duty to hit my child in case I *believed* that hitting it was my duty as a parent.

Objective duties on the other hand are generated by the moral facts alone. I have a duty to spend time with my child (or hit it) only if such a duty really exists, independently of my belief about its existence.

Both Halbig and Moyar claim that Hegel's section on conscience can be understood as a repudiation of the view that subjective duties exist. With the earlier reconstruction of the dialectical development of conscience in mind, it is fairly easy to see why this is the case.

Halbig argues that when talking about someone's convictions and his reasons for them, we should distinguish between the first-person and the third-person perspective.<sup>47</sup> If asked why I did what I did, usually I will refer to the rightness of the action itself and not to my conviction that it was right. If, for example, someone were to ask me why I helped the blind man cross the street, I would simply reply, "Because he needed help", and not "Because of my conviction that he needed help". Of course, I might also answer by stating, "I believed he needed help", but in such a case, it is not the belief alone that is supposed to give the reason for my action but the underlying moral fact that makes my belief true (the fact that the blind man needed help).

From a third-person perspective, things look somewhat different. From this perspective, it is possible to address a difference between what someone believes to be his duty and what his duty actually is. Someone else might say about my helping the blind man cross the street: "He thought he should help the blind man, but he was wrong. By helping him, he made an adult, who could have easily crossed the street alone, feel like a helpless child". From the first-person perspective, it would be absurd to say at the time of action: "I believe I am obligated to help him, but I am not obligated to help him". Subjective belief in one's obligation and one's objective obligation can only come apart from the third-person perspective.

Given this, the question arises how it is possible that we sometimes criticize someone for doing the right thing if his conviction was not "right", that is, in case he did not do what he *believed* to be right. Imagine, for example, that I believe that I am obligated to help the blind man cross the street, even though objectively this is not the case, and that I then—despite my conviction to the contrary—do not help him cross the street. It seems that if someone were to find out that I acted contrary to my conviction, he would be warranted in finding my behavior morally reproachable even though I acted according to duty (*de re* but not *de dicto*).

One might try to solve this riddle by referring to subjective duties. In the case just described, I would have performed my objective duty, but I would have failed to live up to my subjective duty, which consists in acting according to my conviction.

As we have seen from the earlier reconstruction of the Morality chapter, conscience is defined by the belief not only that subjective duties exist but also that they are the only kind of duty there is. This is explicitly noted by Halbig.<sup>48</sup> He continues to read the ensuing dialectical instability of conscience as a critique of the possibility of subjective duties.

Halbig's main point is that conscience is forced to refer to objective duties to determine what *its* duty is. He points to Hegel's example of the cowardly conscience that nevertheless claims to be dutiful by referring to the duty of sustaining one's life. This duty must be understood as an objective duty, one that must also be recognized by others. At the same time, however, conscience has rejected the idea of objective duties in favor of subjective ones. Herein lies, according to Halbig, the "structural instability" (*strukturelle Instabilität*) of conscience.<sup>49</sup> Halbig sums up the lesson of conscience as follows:

For Hegel, there are no subjective moral reasons and with that no subjective moral duties, i.e. duties that are constituted by the belief about them.<sup>50</sup>

It also follows from Halbig's reading that for Hegel *all* duties are objective duties. Hegel's discussion of conscience in the *Philosophy of Right* is much clearer and more explicit in this regard: truthful conscience itself aspires to *get things right*, to do what it is *objectively* obligated to do.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, an individual conscience cannot avoid being judged by the objective standards it seeks. Those standards, according to the *Philosophy of Right*, are only to be found in the ethical life that an individual conscience is a part of. Only if it is in tune with the objective duties, norms, and values of *Sittlichkeit* is conscience to be called "truthful" (*wahrhaft*).<sup>52</sup>

In addition, what initially might have looked like a subjective duty—to act according to one's moral conviction—must be understood as a "complex objective duty".<sup>53</sup> A complex objective duty is a duty that involves the *relation* between my conviction and my action, and it holds regardless of whether there really is an objective duty for the action alone. For example, I might believe that I am obligated to help my son study for an important exam, even though objectively there is no such duty. If I were *not* to act according to my conviction, I would therefore not violate an objective duty to help my son. However, I would violate the *complex* objective duty that states that I should act according to what I believe is right, that is, that I should not counteract my own moral convictions.<sup>54</sup>

Moyar is in basic agreement with Halbig's reading. He, too, acknowledges that Hegel's account of conscience includes a powerful critique of

the concept of subjective duties and that for Hegel duties must be objective. In one important respect, Moyar goes even further. Not only does he claim that supposedly subjective duties are really complex objective duties but he also claims that, for Hegel, *all* objective duties are essentially complex objective duties: "We can view every duty as a complex objective duty involving belief and purpose".<sup>55</sup> This claim is substantiated by Moyar's reconstruction of Hegel's view about the relation between motivating and justifying reasons, a relation that Moyar discusses under the heading of the "Complex Reasons Identity Condition (CRIC)".<sup>56</sup> However, understanding CRIC would require us to shift from Hegel's treatment of conscience in the *Phenomenology* to what Hegel calls "true conscience" (*wahrhaftes Gewissen*) in the *Philosophy of Right* and especially its relation to ethical life as it is worked out in the latter.

Another distinctive feature of Moyar's reading of the Conscience chapter in the *Phenomenology* is his emphasis on the "ambiguity of conscience".<sup>57</sup> He stresses the point that conscience in the *Phenomenology* is not only this flawed shape of consciousness that mistakenly believes that its convictions alone generate duties (i.e. subjective duties). Instead, according to Moyar, conscience also appears in the *Phenomenology* as an "actual" or "truthful" conscience that recognizes the existence of objective duties.<sup>58</sup> As evidence he cites the following passage toward the end of the Conscience chapter,

[b]ut *actual* conscience is not this persistence in a knowing and willing that opposes itself to the universal; on the contrary, the universal is the element of its *existence*, and its language declares its action to be a *recognized* duty.<sup>59</sup>

However, all that we are given in this quote is a rather formal characterization of what an actual or truthful conscience would have to look like: It would have to have a particular content *and* it would have to be universal at the same time. Actual conscience would have to be the "knowing and willing" of what is *objectively* right. However, it is clearly only in the *Philosophy of Right*, not in the *Phenomenology*, that Hegel provides an account of what this realm of objective practical normativity looks like.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, Moyar's claim that "the *Phenomenology* account of conscience is an account of conscience *within modern Ethical Life*" seems unwarranted.<sup>61</sup>

As I have pointed out earlier, conscience in the *Phenomenology* is not followed by ethical life but by religion. In the *Phenomenology*, the chapter about conscience does not end with the insight that all duty must be objective and therefore grounded in ethical life. Instead, conscience itself as well as the entire practice of morality (*including* ancient ethical life) is portrayed as deficient. At the end of the Conscience chapter in the *Phenomenology*, we learn that any attempt to act morally is doomed

to fail. It is this very insight of conscience into the limits of ethics as such and its subsequent plea for forgiveness that motivates the transition to religion. Within the *Phenomenology*, the problems of conscience that concern practical normativity are not solved within that very realm of practical normativity. Instead, solving the normative problems of conscience requires changing the subject, abandoning ethics for religion.<sup>62</sup> This clearly points toward a substantial (meta-)ethical shortcoming of the *Phenomenology*. From both the *Phenomenology* and the *Philosophy of Right*, we can learn that the concept of subjective duties is flawed. However, it is only in the *Philosophy of Right* that we find a satisfying theory of objective duties and their grounding in ethical life.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, I disagree with Moyer's assessment that conscience in the *Phenomenology* and ethical life in the *Philosophy of Right* are mutually complementary.<sup>64</sup> Rather, modern ethical life as portrayed in the *Philosophy of Right* solves the unsolved normative problems raised by the *Phenomenology*'s account of conscience.

#### 9.4 Hegel Versus External Reasons

Bernard Williams has famously proposed the distinction between an internalist and an externalist view about practical reasons. The externalist believes that there can be practical reasons without any link to the agent's internal motivational set. The internalist, on the other hand, claims that practical reasons must exhibit such a connection; otherwise, they would not be practical reasons, that is, reasons for action:

Basically, and by definition, any model for the internal interpretation must display a relativity of the reason statement to the agent's *subjective motivational set*, which I shall call the agent's *S*.<sup>65</sup>

Williams, who argues for the truth of internalism, explains the agent's motivational set as follows:

*S* can contain such things as dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstractly called, embodying commitments of the agents.<sup>66</sup>

It may seem like *S* is a rather static set, but Williams stresses that this is not the case. Rather, an agent's true *S* is the result of a deliberative process, that is, the agent's deliberative action that explores, expands, corrects, organizes, and weighs one's given motivational elements.<sup>67</sup>

As Moyer points out, the basic idea of Williams's internalism can also be explained with the help of motivating and justifying reason.<sup>68</sup> A motivating reason is simply a reason that motivates the agent to act. A justifying reason is a normative or *good* reason. On the internalist view

proposed by Williams, there are no justifying reasons that are not also motivating. If something *cannot* be motivating, it is not a reason.

With his claim that justifying reasons cannot exist without them being motivating reasons, the Williams-style internalist seems to contradict a view about practical rationality that is usually called “rationalism”.<sup>69</sup> I will use Michael Smith’s definition:

If it is right for agents to  $\Phi$  in circumstances C, then there is a reason for those agents to  $\Phi$  in C.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, the rationalist claims that the justifying reasons for a certain action in a given situation are created by the moral facts of that situation alone, regardless of the motivational set of the agent. Since the motivational set of the agent is excluded from the rationalist picture, the Williams-style internalist will not agree to it. According to Williams, the existence of a practical reason for an action depends on whether the agent “has some motive which will be served or furthered” by that action in question.<sup>71</sup>

Robert Pippin was the first Hegel scholar to explicitly ask the question whether Hegel would accept the internalist condition for the existence of practical reasons proposed by Williams.<sup>72</sup> In his “Hegel’s Ethical Rationalism”, Pippin argues that Hegel indeed rejects externalism and is thus an internalist. Besides the *Philosophy of Right*, it is the Conscience chapter of the *Phenomenology* where Pippin finds some of the clearest evidence for Hegel’s anti-externalism. In his discussion of the beautiful soul and its condemnation of the acting conscience, Hegel attacks the Kantian idea of performing duty only for duty’s sake as lacking actuality (*das Unwirkliche*). Hegel justifies this verdict by pointing out that the “pure end” of performing one’s duty has “its actuality in the deed of the individuality, and the action has thereby the aspect of particularity”.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, it is hypocritical of the beautiful soul—an expression of a kind of valet mentality—to condemn an action as undutiful because it involves the satisfaction of the agent’s particular motives. A duty is actual only if it is actualized through an individual’s action. And as Hegel points out throughout the entire Morality chapter, there is always some particular content to an individual’s will, something specific that he is motivated by.<sup>74</sup> In the section on the moral worldview, for example, moral consciousness experiences the fact that it is impossible to completely set aside its “inclinations and drives”.<sup>75</sup> Later, this experience is confirmed by conscience which comes to realize that the particular content for its convictions is provided by its “*natural* consciousness, i.e. its drives and inclinations”.<sup>76</sup>

These passages clearly show that Hegel does—as Pippin claims—reject the idea of wholly external practical reasons, thus making him some sort of internalist.<sup>77</sup> But what kind of internalist exactly is Hegel?



Pippin is eager to point out that Hegel's internalism is not to be mistaken for Humean anti-rationalism.<sup>78</sup> On a Humean picture, there is no genuinely *practical* rationality since in practical matters reason is "the slave of the passions".<sup>79</sup> Hegel clearly rejects this claim. As Pippin emphasizes, Hegel is "a rationalist in ethics"; that is, he believes "that rational considerations can be motivating on their own (can count for an agent as reasons)".<sup>80</sup>

But how can Hegel be a rationalist *and* an internalist? He can be both only if internalism is *not* limited to the Williamsian view of internalism according to which the existence of justifying reasons depends on the given motivational set of an agent or the procedural expansion of that set. Therefore, Pippin has Hegel agreeing to the following, much more general internalist principle:

For some fact, or state, or consideration to be able to count as a reason for S to do A, S's acceptance of, or having of, such a consideration, must be able to motivate him to do A.<sup>81</sup>

This principle is so generous that it even allows for the possibility that one's mere insight into what is right and dutiful *generates* one's motivations to act accordingly.<sup>82</sup> It is thus wide enough to even include the Kantian who holds that pure practical reason can be a source of motivation.<sup>83</sup> The only case that is really ruled out by this principle is that "some consideration could count as a norm, and so a compelling reason for me to act, even if it could be shown that I could never act on such a reason".<sup>84</sup> As Pippin himself admits, it is doubtful whether there is any position in the history of philosophy that has ever defended such an extreme version of externalism.<sup>85</sup>

In a past publication, I have mistakenly criticized Pippin for associating Hegel's position too closely with Williams's internalism.<sup>86</sup> In fact, Pippin *does* acknowledge the difference between Williams's and Hegel's internalism. He states correctly that for Hegel, in contrast to Williams, the justification of one's action "cannot merely appeal to or 'deliberate from' contingent elements of 'my motivational set'".<sup>87</sup> The problem is rather that the kind of internalism that Pippin (correctly) has Hegel subscribe to seems so weak that he really is *not* an internalist in Williams's original sense, that is, the sense of internalism that Pippin starts out with.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, however, Hegel's internalism must be strong enough to rule out the Kantian idea of performing one's duty for duty's sake alone, without any particular motive being satisfied.<sup>89</sup>

I have already argued that it is only in the *Philosophy of Right* and not in the *Phenomenology* that ethical life is presented as a solution to the problems of morality and conscience. To fully understand Hegel's unique combination of ethical rationalism and internalism, we would thus have to turn away from the *Phenomenology* and toward the *Philosophy of*

*Right*. In the latter, Hegel argues that the motivational power of practical reasons is guaranteed by the fact that individuals are a part of ethical life. On the one hand, the institutions of ethical life provide individuals with social roles that come with built-in objective norms and values and thereby provide justifying reasons for all agents in those roles. On the other hand, it is through these social roles that individuals gain a concrete and multifaceted identity—as a husband, a parent, a businessman, a teacher, a politician, and so on. The roles and practices that make up the agent’s identity are powerful motivational sources. The very goal of education (*Erziehung*) is to transform one’s immediate, natural drives into socially grounded rational motivations. And even when conflicting motivations (e.g., some onslaught of unmediated drives or inclinations) might pull the agent in a different direction, his socially mediated identities do not cease to be a source of motivation. The motivation to do the right thing might not always win out, but ethical life guarantees that an individual can always be or at least learn to be motivated to do what’s right.<sup>90</sup> However, to fully flesh out the internalist condition for practical reasons within Hegel’s mature theory of ethical life is a task for another time.

## Notes

- 1 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 326 (§ 440). I use the German original throughout this chapter. If no other source is cited, the English translations are my own. Since English editions of the *Phenomenology* are commonly divided into paragraphs, I indicate the paragraph in parentheses.
- 2 For an excellent account of the method of the *Phenomenology* see Anton F. Koch, “Sinnliche Gewißheit und Wahrnehmung”, in Klaus Vieweg and Wolfgang Welsch (eds.), *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes. Ein kooperativer Kommentar zu einem Schlüsselwerk der Moderne* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2008), pp. 135–152.
- 3 See Hegel, “Phänomenologie”, pp. 68–81 (§§ 73–89).
- 4 Ibid., p. 326 (§ 440).
- 5 Hegel’s note about the second edition of the *Phenomenology* says “nicht Umarbeiten [*sic*]”. It is included in the *Meiner* edition, edited by Hans-Friedrich Wessels and Heinrich Clairmont: G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1988), p. 552. All future references to the *Phenomenology* are based on the Suhrkamp edition quoted in the note 1.
- 6 See G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), § 124, § 132. For a reconstruction of these two different rights of subjectivity, see Christoph Halbig, “‘Das Recht des subjektiven Willens’ (§ 132). Überlegungen zu Hegels Theorie praktischer Rationalität”, *Hegel-Studien*, 44 (2009), pp. 95–105, and Halbig, “‘Das Recht ... , sich befriedigt zu finden’ (RPh § 124). Überlegungen zur Bedeutung der affektiven und konativen Dimension des Menschen für Hegels Normativitätstheorie und Ethik”, *Internationales Jahrbuch des Deutschen Idealismus*, 13 (2015), pp. 97–125.
- 7 Hegel, “Phänomenologie”, p. 441 (§ 596).

- 8 Ibid., p. 443 (§ 599).
- 9 Ibid., p. 443 (§ 599).
- 10 Ibid., p. 443 (§ 599). The moral worldview seems to be an amalgamation of Kant's theories of the postulates of practical reason and Fichte's development of this doctrine. See Ludwig Siep, *Der Weg der Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), p. 206.
- 11 Ibid., p. 444 (§ 602).
- 12 Ibid., p. 444 (§ 602).
- 13 Ibid., p. 447 (§ 604).
- 14 Ibid., p. 447 (§ 603).
- 15 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik I* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 152.
- 16 Hegel, "Phänomenologie", p. 454–455 (§ 618).
- 17 Ibid., p. 456 (§§ 620–621).
- 18 Ibid., p. 457 (§ 622).
- 19 Ibid., p. 457 (§ 622).
- 20 Ibid., p. 458 (§ 622).
- 21 Ibid., p. 464 (§ 631).
- 22 Ibid., p. 464 (§ 631). The historical positions that play into the idea of conscience, as it is treated by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*, are mainly those of Jacobi, Fichte, and the Romantics, especially Novalis. See Siep, "Der Weg der Phänomenologie", pp. 211–216; and Emanuel Hirsch: "Die Beisetzung der Romantiker in Hegels 'Phänomenologie des Geistes'", in Hans Friedrich Fulda and Dieter Henrich (eds.), *Materialien zu Hegels 'Phänomenologie des Geistes'* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 4th ed., 1979) pp. 245–275.
- 23 Ibid., p. 466 (§ 634): "in unmittelbarer Einheit sich *verwirklichendes moralisches* Wesen und die Handlung unmittelbar *konkrete* moralische Gestalt".
- 24 Ibid., p. 468 (§ 637): "Das Gewissen hat *für sich selbst* seine Wahrheit an der *unmittelbaren Gewißheit* seiner selbst. Diese *unmittelbare* konkrete Gewißheit seiner selbst ist das Wesen; sie nach dem Gegensatze des Bewußtseins betrachtet, so ist sie die eigene unmittelbare *Einzelheit* der Inhalt des moralischen Tuns".
- 25 Ibid., p. 467 (§ 635).
- 26 Ibid., p. 467 (§ 635): "In der einfachen moralischen Handlung des Gewissens sind die Pflichten so verschüttet, daß allen diesen einzelnen Wesen unmittelbar *Abbruch* getan wird und das prüfende Rütteln an der Pflicht in der unwankenden Gewißheit des Gewissens gar nicht stattfindet".
- 27 Ibid., p. 470 (§ 640): "Denn das *Wesen* der Handlung, die Pflicht besteht in der *Überzeugung* des Gewissens von ihr".
- 28 Ibid., p. 470 (§ 640): "Die *seiende Wirklichkeit* des Gewissens ... ist ... das geistige Element des Anerkanntwerdens".
- 29 Ibid., p. 470 (§ 640): „[D]as als Pflicht Gewußte vollführt sich und kommt zur Wirklichkeit, weil eben das Pflichtmäßige das Allgemeine aller Selbstbewußtsein[e], das Anerkannte und also Seiende ist".
- 30 Ibid., p. 472 (§ 642): „eine absolute Vielheit der Umstände, die sich rückwärts in ihre Bedingungen, seitwärts in ihrem Nebeneinander, vorwärts in ihren Folgen unendlich teilt und ausbreitet".
- 31 Ibid., p. 472 (§ 643).
- 32 Ibid., p. 473 (§ 643).
- 33 Ibid., p. 474 (§ 644).
- 34 Ibid., pp. 477–478 (§ 649): "Sie wissen also nicht, ob dies Gewissen moralisch gut oder ob es böse ist, oder vielmehr sie können es nicht nur nicht wissen, sondern müssen es auch für böse nehmen".

- 35 Ibid., p. 478 (§ 652).
- 36 Ibid., p. 479 (§ 653): "Das Bewußtsein spricht seine *Überzeugung* aus; diese Überzeugung ist es, worin allein die Handlung Pflicht ist; sie *gilt* auch allein dadurch als Pflicht, daß die Überzeugung *ausgesprochen* wird".
- 37 Ibid., p. 481 (§ 656): "Der Geist und die Substanz ihrer Verbindung ist also die gegenseitige Versicherung von ihrer Gewissenhaftigkeit, guten Absichten, das Erfreuen über diese wechselseitige Reinheit und das Laben an der Herrlichkeit des Wissens und Aussprechens, des Hegens und Pflegens solcher Vortrefflichkeit".
- 38 Ibid., p. 484 (§ 658). The model for Hegel's beautiful soul is most likely *not* Schiller's concept by the same name but rather concepts and literary figures of Jacobi, Goethe and Novalis. See Siep, "Der Weg der Phänomenologie", p. 214.
- 39 Ibid., p. 485 (§ 660).
- 40 Ibid., p. 488 (§ 665).
- 41 Ibid., p. 490 (§ 667).
- 42 Ibid., pp. 492–493 (§ 670).
- 43 Ibid., p. 492 (§ 669): "die Wunden des Geistes heilen, ohne daß Narben bleiben".
- 44 Ibid., pp. 493–494.
- 45 See Christoph Halbig, "Die Wahrheit des Gewissens", in Vieweg and Welsch (eds.), *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, pp. 489–503; Dean Moyar, *Hegel's Conscience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), especially ch. 3.1.
- 46 Jonathan Dancy, *Practical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 49.
- 47 Halbig, "Die Wahrheit des Gewissens", pp. 494–497.
- 48 Ibid., p. 498.
- 49 Ibid., p. 500.
- 50 Ibid., p. 502. The translation is my own.
- 51 See e.g. Hegel, "Rechtsphilosophie", § 137: "Das wahrhafte Gewissen ist die Gesinnung, das, was *an und für sich* gut ist, zu wollen".
- 52 Ibid., § 137. See also Halbig, "Die Wahrheit des Gewissens", p. 503.
- 53 See Dancy, "Practical Reality", p. 54.
- 54 Halbig, "Die Wahrheit des Gewissens", p. 497.
- 55 Moyar, "Hegel's Conscience", p. 87.
- 56 Ibid., pp. 72–73.
- 57 Ibid., pp. 68–73.
- 58 Ibid., p. 69: "In the experience of conscience Hegel does not discredit the authority of conscience in general, but only its immediate claim to justification. The result is an altered concept of conscience that he calls 'actual conscience'." See also Moyar, "Hegel's Conscience", p. 72.
- 59 Hegel, "Phänomenologie", p. 486 (§ 662); transl. by Moyar, "Hegel's Conscience", p. 72.
- 60 Terry Pinkard has acknowledged this in his *Hegel's Phenomenology. The Sociality of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 294–295: "'Ethical life' [in the *Philosophy of Right*] thus makes good on the claims of 'morality' and completes the otherwise unfinished project outlined in the description of the modern moral community in the *Phenomenology*".
- 61 Moyar, "Hegel's Conscience", p. 63.
- 62 It must be noted that this change in topic from ethics to religion is *not* a change to something completely different. The overarching subject of the *Phenomenology* is and remains spirit itself. The change only applies to the guise under which spirit appears. One might also speak of a change to another realm of spirit.

- 63 For a metaethical reconstruction of Hegel's theory of objective duties and their grounding in ethical life, see Sebastian Ostritsch, *Hegels Rechtsphilosophie als Metaethik* (Münster: Mentis, 2014), ch. 7.
- 64 Dean Moyar, "Die Verwirklichung meiner Autorität: Hegels komplementäre Modelle von Individuen und Institutionen", in Christoph Halbig et al. (eds.), *Hegels Erbe* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2004), pp. 209–253.
- 65 Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons", in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 102.
- 66 Williams, "Internal and External Reasons", p. 105.
- 67 Ibid., p. 104.
- 68 Moyar, "Hegel's Conscience", pp. 47–48.
- 69 Confusingly, rationalism is sometimes also called "internalism" since it claims that there is an *internal* or *intrinsic* connection between moral facts and practical reasons. For the distinction between three types of internalism/externalism (one of them being rationalism and anti-rationalism), see Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 61–63.
- 70 Smith, "The Moral Problem", p. 62.
- 71 Williams, "Internal and External Reasons", p. 101.
- 72 See Robert B. Pippin, "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism", in *Idealism as Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 417–450.
- 73 Hegel, "Phänomenologie", p. 489 (§ 665): "seine Wirklichkeit hat er [der reine Zweck] in dem Tun der Individualität und die Handlung dadurch die Seite der Besonderheit an ihr". This passage is quoted in a different translation in Pippin, "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism", p. 434.
- 74 This is argued for in a much more straightforward manner in the introduction to the *Philosophy of Right* where Hegel discusses the tripartite structure of the will as combining universality (*Allgemeinheit*), particularity (*Besonderheit*), and singularity (*Einzelheit*).
- 75 Hegel, "Phänomenologie", p. 457 (§ 622).
- 76 Ibid., p. 473 (§ 643): "das natürliche Bewußtsein, d. h. die Triebe und Neigungen".
- 77 Moyar agrees with Pippin's anti-externalist reading of Hegel. However, in his "Hegel's Conscience", p. 49, Moyar refers not to the Spirit but to the Reason chapter of the *Phenomenology* to make this point: "[Hegel] argues against an externalist view of reasons in the section of the *Phenomenology* entitled 'Virtue and the Way of the World.' He presents a stark opposition between the external reasons position of the 'knight of virtue' and the internal reasons position that relativizes reasons to individuality [*Einzelheit*]. The victory of the latter view, 'the Way of the World,' is an argument for an internal reasons position (though, of course, this is not Hegel's complete view of normativity)".
- 78 William H. Walsh, *Hegelian Ethics* (London: Palgrave, 1969), p. 38, mistakes Hegel for a Humean anti-rationalist. See Pippin, "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism", pp. 435–436.
- 79 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), p. 415.
- 80 Pippin, "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism", p. 436.
- 81 Ibid., p. 438.
- 82 Halbig, "Das Recht ..., sich befriedigt zu finden" (RPh § 124)", pp. 109–110, n. 19, has a similar critique of Pippin's relaxed principle of internalism.
- 83 For a Kantian version of the internalist requirement on the existence of practical reasons see Christine Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reasons", in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 311–334, here: p. 324.

- 84 Pippin, "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism", p. 437.
- 85 Ibid., p. 438.
- 86 Ostritsch, "Hegels Rechtsphilosophie als Metaethik", p. 109, p. 225.
- 87 Pippin, "Hegel's Ethical Rationalism", p. 444. See also Robert B. Pippin: "Hegels Praktischer Realismus", in Halbig et al. (eds.), *Hegels Erbe*, pp. 295–323, here: p. 296.
- 88 At this point, one might even be skeptical, whether Williams and Hegel are dealing with the same questions. Clearly, Hegel's *Phenomenology* is not primarily about motivation and practical rationality, whereas they are at the core of Williams's paper. However, as I have tried to show in this chapter, the *Phenomenology* does contain rich thoughts concerning those very topics.
- 89 For Hegel's internalism in the context of his critique of Kant's idea of pure practical reason, see Allen W. Wood: *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 141–142, 148–152, 169–172.
- 90 For a more detailed account see Ostritsch, "Hegels Rechtsphilosophie als Metaethik", pp. 108–110, pp. 224–229. See also Moyar, "Hegel's Conscience", p. 74 for his previously mentioned "Complex Reasons Identity Condition (CRIC)".

# 10 On Comay on Hegel<sup>1</sup>

*Gunnar Hindrichs*

Over the past thirty years, a cluster of readings on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* have become accepted that can be described as an exercise in modernized and critical pragmatism.<sup>2</sup> According to this cluster, the *Phenomenology* deals with the fact that consciousness, which stands in abstract relationship to the objective world, transforms itself into a social context in which all representational objectivity makes sense only within the relationships between people, and in which these relationships, namely, acting together and talking to each other, are the determinants of thought. Hegel's name for this context is "spirit", and he characterizes it as "the *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*" (PS § 177).<sup>3</sup> Although the label is unmistakably Rousseauian (*moi commun*<sup>4</sup>), Rousseau's threefold attack on property, education, and state rule is unimportant in the readings alluded to. What counts, rather, is the transformation of subjects representing the world into subjects who are acting together and talking to each other. Within such common acting and talking, claims are negotiated and struggles for recognition are fought, and the suggestion holds that it is precisely the appropriation of this horizon that the *Phenomenology* is concerned with.

From this perspective, spirit—whose phenomena are considered in the *Phenomenology*—is "the space of reasons"<sup>5</sup>, as Wilfrid Sellars's mantra reads. That is, spirit is the space that has converted the epistemological relationship between a subject and an object into the social practice of giving and asking for reasons, thereby realizing Richard Rorty's demand for "solidarity" instead of "objectivity".<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, spirit is also the realm of *failing* social relations, plights in which the participants of these practices become entangled. Such failing relations are characterized by the fact that they violate the condition presupposed by the solidarity of an exchange of reasons, namely, the structure of the mutual recognizing as mutually recognizing people.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, the space of reasons becomes the battlefield of the struggle for recognition. According to this cluster of readings, both sides, the space of reasons and its damages, are implemented by the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. By progressing from "consciousness" via "self-consciousness" via "reason" to "spirit", and

by interpreting the latter through the notion of alienation, the argument moves from objectivity to solidarity and unfolds solidarity in the figures (*Gestalten*) of its failure. In this vein, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* can become the model of a specific modernity: the modernity of ongoing processes of learning to act together.

What is irritating about the outlined readings is that they treat the phenomena of human and divine law, *Bildung*, morality, the beautiful soul, or revolutionary terror, which are so intensively discussed in *Phenomenology*'s chapter on Spirit, as misguided derivatives of the space of reasons and mutual recognition. In the light of those readings, these phenomena appear as misleading distortions but not as constitutive factors of spirit. And indeed, neither giving and asking for reasons nor the relationship of mutual recognition require Rameau's nephew or Antigone for their proper account. However, this does not speak for but against these interpretations. In them, the phenomena of spirit become merely colorful, albeit sometimes disturbing, garments that could, in principle, be replaced or supplemented by other phenomena. This implication, however, stands in obvious contradiction to the line of argument that the *Phenomenology* pursues. In the end, the methodical problem lurking at the bottom is that this cluster of readings does not possess a robust theory of negativity. For the literature alluded to, negativity is a deficiency, a failure, a transgression, a preliminary stage of positivity, in which positivity represents the realm of spirit, while guilt and fate, alienation, dissemblance, beautiful soul, the guillotine become mere privations of the relationship of mutual recognition and reason-giving. In short, negative phenomena degenerate to social pathologies.<sup>8</sup> But in fact, they are constitutive for *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. One of Hegel's central ideas is the interpretation of semblance (*Schein*) as a phenomenon (*Erscheinung*) of spirit.<sup>9</sup> This idea requires that the negativity of semblance, its missing the truth, must be understood as an inherent function of the representation of truth. As is well known, Hegel's title of this function is "determinate negation" (PS § 79), that is, a negation that does not form a breach, or a pathology, of the positive, or the healthy, but realizes the positive in the first place. If this is the methodological meaning of the *Phenomenology*, then those phenomena cannot be understood as stumbling blocks of the learning processes toward solidarity and mutual recognition in the space of reasons. Rather, they are to be conceived as indispensable negative *articulations* of spirit. The foremost version of the indispensably negative, however, is negation brought to its extreme: *la terreur*.

## 10.1

Rebecca Comay's book on Hegel and the French Revolution is devoted to the understanding of *terreur*. This small, notable piece of work can be read as an antidote to the aforementioned exercises in pragmatism.



Instead of learning processes that lead us on our way from the objectivity of consciousness to the solidarity of giving reasons and mutual recognition, it posits mourning work in order to demonstrate that all historical experience always comes too late. Like the pragmatist reading, Comay's book interprets the *Phenomenology* as a model of modernity. But according to it, our modernity is a modernity determined by the traumatic experience of time. Hegel's conception overcomes this experience through the work of mourning, through "mourning sickness", whereby the sickness represents the basic structure of historical thinking instead of being the deprival of recognition relationships. The trauma is not pathological but the self-determination of spirit.

The starting point for this interpretation is the claim of what has been called, especially in the pre-Marxist and Marxist tradition, "German Misery" (*Deutsche Misere*). After the French Revolution, the concept of German Misery served to explain the conditions that pressed down the east of the Rhine. Since no revolution had taken place there, the ethical and political conditions were anachronistic in the eyes of many thinkers, and in retrospect, a straight line could be drawn from this anachronism forward to German fascism.<sup>10</sup> Comay's book understands Hegel's relationship to the French Revolution in the light of a suffering from Germany's non-contemporaneity (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*) regarding the French situation. But the book is not concerned with clarifying historical situations. Its concern is philosophical. Comay claims that the German Misery does not represent a *German* misery but the misery of historical experience in general. Accordingly, the book wants to unfold and to grasp the paradox that all historical experience is shaped in an asynchronous, non-contemporaneous way:

We are all miserable—temporal misfits, marooned from our own present, burdened with a legacy that is not ours to inherit, mourning the loss of what was never ours to relinquish, driven by the pressure of secondhand desires, handed-down fantasies, and borrowed hopes. The German encounter with the French revolution is an extreme case of the structural anachronism that afflicts all historical experience. The clocks are never synchronized, the schedules never coordinated.

(4)

Hegel's chapter on spirit is used to explain this approach, and its section on absolute freedom and terror forms the culmination. Absolute freedom puts negativity—the dynamic factor of philosophical thinking—into its purest expression. At the same time, it destroys all experience of thinking by the trivial cut of the guillotine, the "the coldest, emptiest death of all, having no more meaning than chopping off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water" (PS § 590). The revolutionary negation is therefore both the core in the logic of the experience of

consciousness—and the *Phenomenology* presents itself as the science of such experience<sup>11</sup>—and its limit. It is the exception forming the norm of thought (6). Accordingly, it cannot be integrated into that experience. It remains its syncope, which is an epochal dissonance in terms of history. This is precisely the paradox of historical experience mentioned earlier: its delay and non-contemporaneity. In this vein, the absolute knowledge into which the experience of consciousness flows is understood, not as its integral part but rather as overcoming the traumatic syncope. It is the form of thought that exposes the structural inconsistency of experience embodied in revolutionary terror by spelling out the necessity of its coming too late.

In this way, Comay's reading differs from most accounts of Hegel and the French Revolution. Comay does not interpret Hegel's philosophy as a Protestant internalization of July 14, cleansing the revolution of its terror and elevating it to the philosophical world spirit of a "revolution without revolutionaries", as has been claimed from the Young Hegelians up to Jürgen Habermas.<sup>12</sup> Neither does she read it as an insight into capitalist modernity, which Hegel allegedly peeled out of the violent shell of the revolution, as its rational core, in order to provide it with a liberal-conservative compensation in *Bildung*, law and state, as Joachim Ritter's interpretation sought to assert.<sup>13</sup> Nor does she share the view that the *Phenomenology* spells out the Napoleonic end of history after the revolution and the *posthistoire* of bourgeois recognition relations, as Alexandre Kojève's suggestion would have it, displaying enormous influence on existentialism and its aftermath.<sup>14</sup> These three interpretations of the complex "revolution/philosophy", which are, along with the current marginalized Marxist reading,<sup>15</sup> the most important interpretations, boil down to the affirmation of historical time as captured in thought. They claim that Hegel affirms the internalized (Habermas), compensated (Ritter), or post-historical (Kojève) present. Comay, by contrast, shows that the concept of contemporaneity is precisely Hegel's problem. The contemporary becomes a problem through the historical syncope that the revolutionary terror adds to the experience of consciousness. There is no experience of the contemporary here, only the experience of a delay and epochal dissonance. That is why the revolution, which is both the logic and the limit of this experience, cuts through historical synchronicity. Therefore, working through it cannot consist of an affirmation of one's time. Rather, it must take place in the mourning work on negation.

Comay's book develops this idea in five chapters. The first chapter—"Missed Revolutions"—is the one most similar to a study in the history of ideas. It unfolds the experience of a non-contemporaneity of the French Revolution and German thinking from Campe to Fichte to Schlegel. The second chapter, "The Kantian Theater", examines how Kant coped with this non-contemporaneity by raising the revolution to the level of the sublime, and splitting it into a moral revolution, on one hand, and a

theater of distance, on the other. The chapter emphasizes that the banal non-spectacle of the guillotine retracts this very distance and destroys Kant's sublimity, which is based on the safe self-preservation through aesthetic detachment. The third chapter, "The Corpse of Faith", argues that Hegel undermines the alternative between tradition and revolution by representing tradition as a corpse. It shows that the revolutionary syncope just articulates the fracture in all history.

This third chapter contains some of the most stimulating ideas of the book. It shows that modernity, pushed to its peak by the Revolution, realizes nothing else but the "unfinished project of antiquity" (58). Revolution consciously deals with the breach of ancient morality that, as a breach of human and divine law (Creon–Antigone), proves wrong all dreams of beautifully reconciling Hellenism. It further shows that modern Enlightenment appropriates the negation that is inherent in such breach and uses it for its own self-determination. This is done in two variants: in a German variant, which is able to integrate religion into philosophy because religion has sublimated itself into a rational content already during the Reformation, and in a French variant, which leads to the fight of Enlightenment against superstition. Comay interprets, on Freudian lines, the first variant as mourning work, in which the negating philosophy internalizes religion, and the second variant as melancholy, in which the negating philosophy can only negate its unmourned opponent (64ff.). The *terreur* that arises from the labor of the *lumières* is thus to be understood as melancholy. It arises with necessity from the elevation of the third estate. According to Abbé Sieyès's manifesto, the third estate is "nothing" and should become "everything". Therefore, the nation that springs from it forms a totality that must extinguish everything that differs from it. The founding act of the revolutionary nation is its purification from the other. In other words, terror does not arise from translating abstract ideas into action. It arises from the internal negativity of the third state's self-affirmation. Finally, the chapter demonstrates that the beheading of Louis XVI only renders visible the already empty place of absolutist sovereignty (78ff.). Thus, history is neither progress nor a loss of substantial plenitude. Instead, it proves to be the unconscious transmission of an emptiness. The revolutionary terror brings to the fore the unresolved negativity that has driven the spirit since Antigone and Creon and is already evident in the hollowness of the *ancien régime*. In short, melancholic terror is its exposition.

The following fourth chapter, "Revolution at a Distance," deals with the way Hegel resolves this unresolved negativity. It examines "Spirit Certain of Itself" (PS § 596ff.) and is devoted to the transformation of terror into morality. In this transformation, Hegel takes up the Kantian and Fichtean sublimation of *terreur* in order to let it explode from within. The interpretive argument goes as follows: morality is a perversion of the revolution, namely, the internalization of absolute freedom; its perversion

is an aestheticization, namely, the turn to the sublime; and its aestheticization is an ideology, namely, Protestant inwardness in its bigotry and self-destruction. With this three-step unmasking, Hegel dispenses himself with the translation of the revolution into a renewed beautiful *Sittlichkeit*.

The ultimate chapter, "Terrors of the Tabula Rasa," finally points to Hegel's own mourning work. Comay claims that Hegel dissolves all spiritualization of the traumatic rupture that the revolution inflicts. By exhibiting figures of Protestant inwardness in their self-destructive predicament, Hegel adheres to a "phenomenology of embodied freedom" instead of a "noumenology of the pure will" (153). The interpretation of the section on "Conscience; the Beautiful Soul, Evil, and its Forgiveness" (PS § 632ff.) is decisive here. Kojève had argued that Hegelian forgiveness was a reconciliation of theory and practice, of philosophy and politics, of Germany and France, of Hegel and Napoleon. Allegedly, the wound inflicted on the beautiful soul was the defeat that Napoleon inflicted on the Germans, and forgiveness was directed to the evil that had been committed by Napoleon's political misdeeds.<sup>16</sup> Comay calls this claim "crazy" but "gripping" (137). It enables her to decipher Hegel's philosophy as the heir to the revolution, who is able to forgive the evil (the *terreur*) and the wounds inflicted by the revolution. According to what has been said, the wounds consist in the negativity of the philosophical spirit as manifested by the Revolution. Correspondingly, the self-sublation of the beautiful soul through the forgiveness of evil means to forgive the impurity of revolutionary action and, conversely, to forgive the unreality of pure reason. Thus, the relationship of German philosophy to the French Revolution turns into a relationship of damaged life to its trauma, a trauma that the damaged life forgives and whose inheritance it is thus able to assume (151).

This conclusion is based on a misreading of the passage about the beautiful soul. Apparently, the fact that Hegel's concept of the beautiful soul has roots in Jacobi's novel *Woldemar* is unknown to Comay.<sup>17</sup> But even independently of this, her conclusion remains unsatisfactory from a systematic viewpoint. The kaleidoscope of different contexts, which could become fruitful in the other chapters,<sup>18</sup> makes the argument fizzle out in the last chapter. As a whole, Comay's book pursues the idea that negativity as manifested in the revolution constitutes the logic of historical experience and that this experience is mastered by absolute knowledge, interpreted as mourning work. But the book's conclusion recoils from explicating this mastery. Instead, it frays and finally doubts whether Hegel has realized the plan Comay ascribes to him:

It would be a great exaggeration to say that Hegel's overcoming of Kant and company makes good on the promise of the Revolution, or that he finally escapes the asceticism he so severely challenges. But with this last gesture, he reins back, if only for a moment, the chronic

temptation to slide from a phenomenology of embodied freedom to a noumenology of the pure will. In this way Hegel returns thought to the order of experience, even if it is a question of a missed experience, a lapsed experience, or even, in the end, another's experience—an experience that came knocking, only to find that “we, the masters, were not home”.

(153)

The book closes with this passage. The Benjamin quote<sup>19</sup> at the end is elevating but not illuminating. We must, therefore, ask ourselves to what extent Comay's studies could contribute to an interpretation of the *Phenomenology* not avoiding the problem of absolute knowledge.

## 10.2

In the pursuit of an answer, two conditions have to be observed. First, one must introduce the concept of truth. In Comay's book, the concept of truth has no argumentative meaning. However, the semblance (*Schein*) of the figures of consciousness can be reinterpreted as a phenomenon (*Erscheinung*) of the spirit only if its untruth is understood as a constitutive of the spirit's truth. This applies to historical experience, too, which has been integrated into the experience of consciousness. It forms the experience of a shine that must be decipherable as the appearance of truth. Absolute knowledge is the result of such deciphering. It is only for this reason that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* does appear as the “first part” of a “system of science”. It is the introduction to the knowledge of the true.<sup>20</sup>

Second, it should be remembered that *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is a reflection of spirit onto itself. Spirit grasps itself in this reflective process. Accordingly, its statements are not steps of an *intentio recta* toward what is stated but models of the *intentio obliqua* of thinking. This distinguishes Hegel's phenomenology from the phenomenology of the 20th century, which aimed at getting “to the things themselves”. Hegel's “matter itself” (*die Sache selbst*) is the result of absolute reflection, while Husserl's, Scheler's, or Heidegger's “things themselves” are the result of decreasing reflection in favor of phenomenological description. This difference between the *intention recta* of common-garden phenomenology and the *intentio obliqua* of Hegelian phenomenology has been blurred on two sides of the interpretation of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. One side is interested in the things treated (objective consciousness, recognition, alienation, revolution, etc.) and believes that a phenomenology of these things is provided by *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The other side differentiates between the observed figures of consciousness and the observing consciousness in order to establish absolute knowledge as a kind of knowledge that has to be imposed to natural consciousness as

observed in these figures. The observed figures of consciousness would be the phenomena, the observing consciousness would be the phenomenologist.<sup>21</sup> But *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is as much determined by the double genitive as *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Spirit is both its subject and object. Since it is therefore directed to itself, there is no *intentio recta* of consciousness toward things; also, there is no *intentio recta* of a phenomenological consciousness toward a natural consciousness. Instead, all phenomena form factors of the spirit's *intentio obliqua*. They are moments of a reflection that grasps itself in the passage through its phenomena.

Comay's insights into the revolution are to be understood in light of these two conditions. Then the revolutionary terror would prove to be, under the aspect of truth, the untrue manifestation of truth's proper factor "negation". A manifestation, because the negation that has been determining reason ever since the "unfinished project of antiquity", as Comay dubs it, becomes finally explicit in modern terms through the *terreur*. Untrue, because it does not go beyond banal death. Morality, whose articulation follows that of revolution in the course of the *Phenomenology*, is accordingly the reverse figure of its untruth, rotating from the political into the inner mind, which finally hits its target in the figure of conscience. Both untrue figures, revolution and conscience, become the constituents of truth by merging as one reversible figure and by establishing the demand for a political world that would correspond to conscience. Such a world that keeps the inner and the outer in harmony is a religious world: the world that follows the beautiful soul, evil, and forgiveness in the course of the *Phenomenology*, and on which Comay's book is silent. (The readers of the *Phenomenology* are aware that the religious world does not have the last word either but only forms, for its part, the final untrue constituent of truth.) Thus conceived, the untrue manifestation of negation as revolutionary terror provides one of the models needed by spirit's reflection on itself. Rather than being the incentive of our mourning work on revolution and its wound, it serves as the self-image of the spirit, which grasps its truth as a "skull hill". Revolutionary terror is an explicate of truth instead of a trauma. This means that *The Phenomenology of Spirit* does not mourn sickness. Rather, it knows itself as Golgotha (PS § 808). It takes the cross upon itself, on which God—and that means the truth itself—is able to show itself in the world, namely, crucified.

Is this the internalization of the revolution against which Comay rightly raises her voice? No. For the cross remains the cross, even though it forms the place for the manifestation of Spirit. Good Friday is not sublimated at Easter. It is grasped (*begriffen*): as gripped at the root, the *radical* figure of all appearances (*Erscheinungen*) of Spirit, which, as absolute knowledge, no longer appears but is true. For this reason, Hegel, following Schiller, can conclude the *Phenomenology* with the allusion to the Eucharist, in

which the blood appeared and precisely for this reason the crucified God is offered: “Out of the chalice of this realm of spirits/Foams forth to him his infinity” (PS § 808). Comay’s book makes clear that the bottom of the chalice is formed by the revolutionary terror.

## Notes

- 1 This is a revised version of the text that appeared in German in *Hegel-Studien* 52 (2019), S. 209–216.
- 2 The important origins are Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 116ff., and Terry Pinkard, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. A recent version is provided by Georg W. Bertram, *Hegels «Phänomenologie des Geistes»: ein systematischer Kommentar*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2017.
- 3 The acronym “PS” and paragraph numbers refer to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. by Terry Pinkard, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Numbers in parentheses without an acronym refer to Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness. Hegel and the French Revolution*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.
- 4 Rousseau, *Contrat Social* I, 6.
- 5 Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. With an Introduction by Richard Rorty and a Study Guide by Robert Brandom, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 76.
- 6 Richard Rorty, “Solidarity and Objectivity”, in his *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 21–34.
- 7 Axel Honneth, “Von der Begierde zur Anerkennung. Hegels Begründung von Selbstbewußtsein”, in Klaus Vieweg and Wolfgang Welsch (eds.), *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes: ein kooperativer Kommentar zu einem Schlüsselwerk der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), pp. 187–204.
- 8 Frederick Neuhouser, “Life, Freedom, and Social Pathologies”, in Gunnar Hindrichs and Axel Honneth (eds.), *Freiheit: Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongreß 2011 (= Geist und Geschichte 1)* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2013), pp. 681–700.
- 9 See Rüdiger Bubner, “Problemgeschichte und systematischer Sinn einer Phänomenologie”, *Hegel-Studien* 5 (1969), pp. 129–160.
- 10 Despite its one-sidedness, the formulation of this line by Georg Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*, Berlin: Aufbau, 1954, is still worthy of consideration, especially pp. 31 ff. Lukács does not come up in Comay’s book, although his interpretation of the *Phenomenology* as the transfer of spirit into a revolutionless inwardness – “absolute knowledge” with simultaneous acceptance of the alienated (capitalist) world – would have been pertinent to her examination of the German misery. See Georg Lukács, *Der junge Hegel und die Probleme der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft*, Berlin: Aufbau, 1954, pp. 580 ff.
- 11 Otto Pöggeler, “Zur Deutung der Phänomenologie des Geistes”, *Hegel-Studien* 1 (1961), pp. 255–294, has shown that the designation of the *Phenomenology* as the “science of the experience of consciousness” on the title page is not only a bookseller’s misfortune but also justified substantially (see p. 272).
- 12 Jürgen Habermas, “Hegels Kritik der französischen Revolution”, in his *Theorie und Praxis: sozialphilosophische Studien* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1963), pp. 89–107. See the formula “revolution without revolutionaries” on p. 105.

- 13 Joachim Ritter, *Hegel und die französische Revolution*, 2nd edition, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965).
- 14 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel. Leçons sur la phénoménologie de l'esprit, professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'Ecole des Hautes Études* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).
- 15 See, however, Domenico Losurdo, *Hegel e la libertà dei moderni* (Rome: Reuniti, 1992), esp. Kap. XIII.
- 16 Alexandre Kojève, "Hegel, Marx et le christianisme", *Critique* 1 (1946), pp. 339–366.
- 17 See Gustav Falke, "Jacobi und Hegel. Ein methodisches Beispiel zur Interpretation der Phänomenologie des Geistes", *Hegel-Studien* 22 (1987), pp. 129–142. I provide an account of the idealist peripeties of the beautiful soul in my paper "Schöne Seelen: Schiller – Jacobi – Hegel," in Thomas Hanke and Thomas M. Schmidt (eds.), *Der Frankfurter Hegel in seinem Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2015), pp. 161–191.
- 18 Thus, after reading Comay's book, I would like to render my own reflections on revolutionary art religion into a more precise version. Cf. my *Philosophie der Revolution* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017), pp. 230 ff.
- 19 Walter Benjamin, "Zum Bilde Prousts", in his *Gesammelte Schriften* II/1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977), pp. 310–324, here p. 321.
- 20 See Hans-Friedrich Fulda, *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik*, 2nd edition (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1975), and Franck Fischbach, *Du commencement en philosophie. Étude sur Hegel et Schelling* (Paris: Vrin, 1999), pp. 139 ff. Michael N. Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), pp. 270 ff., remains unsatisfactory.
- 21 See, paradigmatically, Werner Marx, *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes: die Bestimmung ihrer Idee in "Vorrede" und "Einleitung"*, 2nd edition (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1981), esp. pp. 30 ff. and pp. 124 ff.



# 11 Religion in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Lee Watkins

## 11.1 Introduction: Religion and Philosophy

Jean-Luc Nancy conjures up a vision of modern spirit lost and despairing, having through its scientific progress brought everything into question, from the notion of “the religious bond of a community” to the belief that our knowledge of the world can come together in a “meaningful totality”. Hegel is introduced as the thinker who can save us, his dialectical method aiding us by setting our minds in opposition to the essential *lack* that we are faced with when we confront a jumbled and atomised world, and providing us with a method by which we can give reality meaning again.<sup>1</sup>

Religion is one way in which the world has traditionally been given meaning, and Hegel's discussion of religion is an important part of his system. For Hegel, religion reveals the truth of the world in its stories, images, practices, and symbols. Religion gives us the truth in “representations”, or “pictures”, which can then be taken up by philosophy and explained logically and conceptually. Until the philosophical explanation of religion has taken place, the world is understood only through “picture-thinking”: indistinctly, through the metaphors and imagery of religious stories. (PS §787)<sup>2</sup>

This account of the nature and status of religious truth seems to put philosophy on a higher footing than religion. For example, Hegel writes that “God is attainable in pure speculative knowledge alone and *is* only in that knowledge”, which suggests that until philosophy arrives to explain in logical terms what exactly religious talk means when it says “God”, we don't truly have a concept of God at all. Unlike philosophy, religion lacks the tools that it requires to fully explain for itself what it is trying to say. (PS §761)

We could stop here and say that religion is a thing of the past, having been superseded by philosophy. Religions have left their imprint on the world, informing, inspiring, and shaping human culture even to this day: so that, for example, in the Western world, we can see the influence of Christianity on art, philosophy, music, and even science.<sup>3</sup> In our

enlightened age, one could go on, religious *belief* is not required for an individual to understand the religious imagery they see about them. The metaphors and symbols of religion are so prevalent in our culture that philosophy has ready to hand the material that it requires for its analysis, using it for the purpose of extracting and explaining logically the symbols and unconscious presuppositions that inform our everyday life. In short, philosophy—or “science”—would be the only tool required today to give meaning to the world, religion having already done its job, in previous generations, of providing a library of stories and images for consumption by philosophical minds, and having now stepped back to allow an enlightened humankind to advance unhindered by its former emphasis on rigid strictures and rituals.

This is certainly one way that Hegel can be read. But it contrasts with certain other passages in Hegel's work where he seems to be stressing the human need for actually existing, living and practised religion. “Religion”, for Hegel, means the human spirit coming to know itself as “spirit”, in other words coming to know itself as the “I that is We and the We that is I”, or as a social being that is “‘minded’ only to the extent that others are so ‘like-minded’” (PS §677, 177).<sup>4</sup> The human individual comes to this personal self-knowledge through the practice of religion, through hearing and feeling the truth of the stories that remind them they are a part of the human community, and it is only once this self-awareness is *felt* by an individual that it becomes possible for them to take it up philosophically and transform it in their own mind into a conceptual system of knowledge.

This last part is very important. Hegel stresses in the Preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit* that the result of a philosophical investigation is worthless if handed down alone, without any system for arriving at it. Hegel considers it his job to provide a *method* for arriving at philosophical truths, but he insists that the truths he has arrived at with his method can have no value to the reader unless the reader *themselves do the work* and, using the method he's provided, arrive at conclusions they can call their own (PS §1ff.).

So if “religion” truly means this self-understanding of the human individual as spirit, then it is not enough that we take this self-understanding on trust. Each of us, if we want to arrive at the philosophical truth, must first reach this self-understanding for ourselves. This means that, for Hegel, every one of us requires religion, at least in the minimal sense of going through a process of contemplating religious stories and symbols in order to arrive at a feeling of our place in the world, as members of a community, or as what Hegel calls “spirit”.

Exactly *how* minimal “religion”, as Hegel understands it, can be is, in a large part, the topic of this chapter. We could go back to the reading above, according to which all we have to do is contemplate the dead religious ideas that we find in our culture, in order to extract the truth

from them. This done, an individual would be able to move on to philosophical analysis of these truths, arriving at truth proper and leaving behind all merely pictorial representations of it. However, according to Hegel, this would provide only an “imagined” self-awareness. Such a limited self-awareness can be arrived at, for example, by studying the gods of ancient Greece or Egypt, the stories of which can often resonate with modern life, but whose ideas are effectively “borrowed” from another culture and can have no deep meaning for a modern individual (PS §756). Similarly, taking Christianity, for example, as something to be borrowed from, as a mere stepping stone on the way to philosophy, would lead to a merely imagined self-awareness. The truth of Christianity not being the individual’s own truth, not being something genuinely believed in by them, the individual would learn nothing of *themselves* by contemplating it. For Hegel, religion must be “revealed”, which means that it must be encountered as a “belief in the world”: what is revealed in the revelation of religion is spirit itself, spirit’s own implicit belief—evident in its cultural norms and practices—in that particular religion’s conception of God. This can only be discovered in a religion which is in fact followed and practised in the present. In short, Hegel believes that the study of religion, if it is to be a precursor to philosophy, must impart knowledge of the practices and beliefs of an actually existing, living culture to which the one studying it belongs (PS §757–759).

I hope that the reason for Hegel’s view on this latter point will become apparent as this chapter progresses. In short, the reason is this: Hegel believes that, without living religion as the basis for philosophy, philosophy becomes merely an empty abstraction. It will never ring true for anyone because it does not appeal to the individual’s deeply felt need for dialectical reconciliation with the world. We’ve seen how Hegel stresses the need for every thinker to make their own way towards philosophical truth, and we can add to this the demand that every thinker feel the *need* for philosophical speculation. For Hegel, this felt need for philosophy arises in living religion, which, in turn, allows philosophy to become a living and necessary human practice.

How then might a Hegelian look at the world today, a world in which religion is profoundly in question? If Hegel did indeed argue that actual religious belief is necessary for philosophy to be possible, might it not be argued that Hegel is out of date, out of step with our secular age, his religious conception of philosophy no longer relevant to contemporary philosophical questions? On the contrary, it will become apparent that Hegel is supremely relevant, because it is in Hegel’s analysis of the importance of religion that we come to see for ourselves the lack that its disappearance has left in the world today, the nothingness only in opposition to which we can arrive once again at a real self-knowledge. In order to show this, it is vital to explain in what sense Hegel was Christian and

to demonstrate that his philosophy was not limited by his own personal Christian beliefs. If Hegel's was a Christian philosophy, then he might argue that the absolute truth of religion could only be felt and experienced in the *Christian* religion. If we were to take Hegel to be a Christian philosopher, then perhaps we would have to conclude that he is irrelevant after all, since today it is unlikely that many people will ever again feel the truth of Christianity in the way that they would have to—according to a Christian Hegel—in order to feel the truth of religion in their lives. But if we take Hegel to have been a Christian in life but whose ideas about religion can be adapted to suit our own present situation, who demonstrates in his writing how religion arises from a deeply felt human need—and which in turn provides an essential spur to the practice of philosophy—then perhaps Hegel can be revived as a thinker both religious *and* relevant today.

The rest of this chapter is divided into three sections, plus an additional section serving to conclude the chapter as a whole. In each section, I focus on the commentators who have helped me most in trying to answer the question I am considering in this chapter: namely, in what sense and to what extent Hegel's concept of religion, as presented in the *Phenomenology*, is relevant and useful today. There are, of course, many other writers I could have referred to in order to give a broader view of Hegelian scholarship on the subject of religion, but in the interests of using the limited space I have available in the most efficient way possible, I have selected the ones that stood out to me as having something interesting to say specifically on the question I am considering. I've also tried to stick to commentators that we can call "contemporary", which I've interpreted to mean: those whose works were published roughly within the past thirty years.

The first section focuses primarily on the work of Ludwig Siep and serves to illustrate the broadness of Hegel's concept of religion.

The next section examines the view that Hegel was a Christian philosopher, and asks in what sense we might still call him so. I look at the work of Terry Pinkard and Stephen Houlgate.

The third section looks at John W. Burbidge and his claim that Hegel must be re-interpreted to account for the decline of the influence of Christianity, and how we might begin looking for religion in the world today.

I conclude by looking briefly at George di Giovanni and returning to Jean-Luc Nancy, and suggesting that some clue as to the place of religion in Hegelian philosophy today might be found in the work of the latter thinker. Even as it retreats, religion leaves behind it a shadow by which its presence is still felt. Perhaps it is in the deconstruction of religion that spirituality will persist in the modern world, or out of which something new will emerge that will serve the essential functions of religion as Hegel identified them.

## 11.2 Hegel's Broad Concept of Religion

According to Ludwig Siep, Hegel's purpose as a philosopher was to demonstrate a unity between human spirit and nature, as well as ultimately to demonstrate that there is an "agreement between religion, science, and the modern European state".<sup>5</sup> Systematic philosophy is important because it reveals this implicit unity, and shows the interconnection of concepts that cannot be properly understood when taken in isolation. Hegel suggests that religion, science, and the modern state are all required for human spirit to come to know itself as it truly is.

But what did Hegel mean by "religion"? For Siep, this is where the problem lies. Hegel claims that Christianity is the highest form of religion and that it is in agreement with modern notions of freedom and scientific thinking, but he does so while defining both *religion* and *Christianity* in such a unique way that they can have no resonance with an ordinary believer's conception of these terms. Since his notions of religion and Christianity are so far from the ordinary conceptions of them, can Hegel really be said to have reconciled the Christian religion with modernity?

Hegel had a "broad concept of religion", with *religion* referring not just to the beliefs and practices of specific groups or churches within society, but also to the ideas of a culture as a whole, insofar as that "people's culture contains a concept of 'the highest,' of truth, and of 'genuine' reality".<sup>6</sup> In other words: so long as a culture has a notion of a highest truth and reality, that culture can be called a religion.

Hegel was interested first and foremost in his own culture, which we might call a "Christian" one insofar as Christianity had, in his view, been the ground of all other intellectual developments: in science, in law, in art, and so on. "The modern age and its science grew up out of the soil of Christianity", writes Siep (describing Hegel's view), "and must be understood against this background".<sup>7</sup> And even where the concept of God can be ignored—for example, in the natural sciences—Hegel would argue that "religion", in the sense that he means the term, is still present, since every way of thinking finds its ground in "the prevailing conception of truth", which is to say: in the culture, and therefore in religion.<sup>8</sup>

Religious ideas have developed throughout history, and Hegel interprets the history of religion from the standpoint of this "Christianity" he saw in his own culture, this being for him religion's highest form. Interpreting the history of religion means finding what is rational in all its forms—and what is rational in the non-Christian forms of religion is, for Hegel, any element that was eventually taken up by Christianity.

Hegel believes that Christianity is the most rational form of religion because it answers the questions raised in his discussion of "Morality" in the *Phenomenology*. Morality is spirit which is certain of itself because it believes it knows its duty and will find happiness by carrying that duty out. Morality has its own conception of God: God is that entity that

guarantees that morality is compatible with human happiness, in other words, that by doing the right thing an individual can become happy.<sup>9</sup>

The God of morality is not the same as the God of religion proper. By the time we arrive at "Religion" in the *Phenomenology*, we have learned that the belief that morality and happiness are compatible is problematic, and so morality's concept of God is unsustainable. Spirit cannot know that its actions and moral convictions are in accordance with the moral law, and so acting in a way that it deems to be moral is not, in itself, the path to happiness. The God of morality has led humanity astray. The human spirit's relationship to the moral law turns out to be difficult and complex, and there must be a reconciliation between, on the one hand, individual human agents and, on the other, the moral law that they find, in practice, so difficult to follow. The God of religion is required, who appears in the "word of reconciliation" between the sinner and the one who judges (PS §670). With reconciliation and forgiveness, a new concept of God is born.

Where the God of morality still reigns, the human individual can feel themselves cut off from God: on the one hand is God's moral law, on the other is the poor sinner who finds themselves so distant from its perfection. Essential to the concept of the God of religion is the "sublation and elimination" of this division between God and humankind.<sup>10</sup> With the word of reconciliation, the human individual finds themselves to be one with God for the first time. It is in this moment that "spirit knows itself as spirit" because it is only now that spirit knows itself as identical with God, despite its personal moral failings.

So religion's task is the reconciliation of human spirit with the world. After the Morality section of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel goes on to discuss "Natural Religion", then "Religion in the Form of Art", before finally arriving at "Revealed Religion", which is Christianity. To discuss the first of these three forms of religion briefly: in natural religion, spirit finds itself manifested in natural forms.<sup>11</sup> For example, "God as Light": God is something distant and universal to whom a people belong, with whom a reconciliation is promised. Portrayed as light, God is something inhuman with whom a reconciliation is something distant and deferred and perhaps even impossible: the God of Light's people can feel they have been rejected by God, even though the promise of reconciliation is there in their concept of the divine.<sup>12</sup> Then we have gods in animal form, which are a step towards the "subjectivisation" of God: we are closer to the notion of God in human form that will be essential to Christianity. And then in the notion of God as "artificer", God is identified with stone and death: one should have in mind the tombs of Egypt. This movement away from what is living in nature to what is dead and inert prepares us for the next stage: spirit has discovered that it cannot find itself wholly in nature and so retreats from it, leaving behind only what is cold and lifeless. Spirit "comes to itself" and will now look for God within the soul of the human subject.<sup>13</sup>

Ancient Greek religion dominates the whole of “Religion in the Form of Art”. In this form, the divine is found in the human. The divine is conceived as something “unnatural”, as artificial, as something made by human beings. Therefore, it is “art-religion”.<sup>14</sup>

Revealed Religion, which is Christianity, begins when God has fled from the statues and hymns, so that these works of art no longer evoke a concept of God as they did in ancient times (PS §753).<sup>15</sup> The Greek culture no longer holds the promise it once did, being one-sided and therefore unsatisfactory.

Siepe emphasises that Hegel saw his own task as being to re-invigorate religion in his own age, so that God might be once more present to people as he was in ancient Greek times.<sup>16</sup> He tries to do this by showing how the Christianity of his day is essential to scientific, political, and philosophical thinking. As we begin to recognise Christian concepts in these other spheres, religion becomes present and alive to us again. Out of religion arise the concepts that we need—that we are already implicitly using—in order to know ourselves as spiritual beings.

In Greek religion, spirit was embodied in the human being: in individuals purified by religious practices, or in gods who took on human forms. In revealed religion, spirit is embodied specifically in Christ: a single instance of a human being who is identical with God. In revealed religion, it is in Christ that we find the truth of ourselves.<sup>17</sup>

But Christ is not *just* embodied: he also dies, and is remembered. It is the recollection of Christ that the individual believer takes up in order to discover the truth about themselves.<sup>18</sup>

But the recollection of Christ—the telling and retelling of the stories of his life—is not enough either. What must happen also is that our knowledge of the life of Christ be worked through in thought. The truth and meaning of the stories of Christ must be understood, and this is how dogma is created, which is, on Hegel’s understanding, essential to religion. Christ therefore plays a “historically revelatory role”: the stories of him provide examples that people can hear and learn, and then what is learned can be thought about, and then philosophical concepts of the truths presented in these stories can be arrived at, which provides the dogma of religion—in other words, the fundamental beliefs of a Christian culture.

Once religion has reached this stage, having unpacked the rational notions that form the basis of a culture, it has almost reached the level of speculative knowledge, or absolute knowing. However, the religious mind—the one who is “pious” and “simply faithful”—will understand the Christian stories in “representational” form, or in what is often called “picture-thinking”. In other words: they will interpret the stories more literally than the philosopher would. For example: the reconciliation with God—which we must remember is the purpose of religion—is taken by the pious to be something to come in the next world, rather than something that exists here and now in the religious community.<sup>19</sup>

For Hegel, the truth of religion is only discovered once the philosopher has “demythologised” Christianity, so that the truth in the stories can be expressed clearly and without the exterior material found in the biblical narrative.<sup>20</sup> Until this has occurred, the truth will only be expressed in “pictures” or “representation”: in the images found in the stories themselves.

The problem with a person remaining in “picture-thinking” is that religion cannot complete its main task this way, which is to demonstrate that God and humankind are identical. As long as you are taking the stories of the Bible as the highest expression of truth, and not finding the concepts within those stories, then God and Christ will remain something other than you, and the task of religion will remain incomplete in your mind.

According to Siep, “absolute knowledge” for Hegel means understanding the world in such a way that we recognise that “in all known laws and principles, our knowledge identifies a structure which is that of our own spirit.”<sup>21</sup> And so anything that we can say truly of God, we are, in fact, also saying about ourselves. And so to talk about God truly, the philosophical concepts of absolute knowledge are required.

From Siep’s account, one might arrive at the impression that Hegel is caught in a contradiction: religion is both true and false. On the one hand, the Christian religion is supposed to be true and necessary for spirit’s understanding of itself, while on the other hand it is superseded by philosophy and “demythologised” so that its central dogmas are understood abstractly and in isolation from the stories of the Bible, which are therefore proved to be, strictly speaking, false. And if we follow the course of Hegel’s philosophical system, of which the *Phenomenology* is the first part, through logic and philosophy of nature and back into the realm of spirit, we see that the “religion” that is so essential to human existence is now transformed into something that would be unrecognisable to most believers. And so Siep writes that “precious little remains of the substance of Christian faith” in Hegel’s theory of “reconciliation achieved in the modern constitutional state and its scientific culture”.<sup>22</sup>

Or perhaps we could read this differently. Perhaps this speculative understanding of religion really is religion in its highest form, as Hegel does seem to suggest in his discussion of “Revealed Religion”, for example when he writes that “God is attainable in pure speculative knowledge alone and *is* only in that knowledge, and is only that knowledge itself” (PS §761).<sup>23</sup> In that case, we could not say that Hegel is contradicting himself: he says that religion is true and necessary and then explains what he means by “religion”.

But this still might be unsatisfying to many readers, who approve of Hegel’s idea of demonstrating the unity between religion and other aspects of spiritual life, and then will be disappointed to find the concept of “religion” to be one so watered down. To put it simply: religion that is understood only abstractly, and doesn’t require rituals and practices, or any belief in the supernatural, might not be considered religion at all.



So, on the one hand, we have a possible contradiction: religion is true and yet false. Hegel tells us that religion is true, but then claims that philosophy supersedes it and proves it to be false.

On the other hand, we have a redefinition of “religion” which seems to lead to an *ironic* understanding of it: religion is something necessary but not to be taken literally. We are to believe in the Trinity, but to understand it as a metaphor for the syllogism; we are to believe in God’s creation of the world, but *really* we must understand that this represents the movement of the concept.<sup>24</sup> While this might be logically consistent, it won’t be convincing to many of those that consider themselves to be faithful Christians.<sup>25</sup>

And Siep is not alone in raising the concern that Hegel’s version of Christianity is incompatible with religion as it is actually experienced and practised. For Horst Althaus, for example, the result of Hegel’s analysis of religion is clear: there is no need for religion in the modern age. This is because of the nature of Hegelian philosophy, which recognises phenomena in order to find what is ideal in them and belongs to spirit, while giving everything inessential an inferior status. Philosophy makes no exception for religion. Hegel’s is “an idealistic system which formally recognises the phenomenon of religion while simultaneously preparing its grave”.<sup>26</sup> Religion in its various historical forms is analysed; Christianity is shown to be the religion most expressive of the concerns of the modern human spirit; and finally, the truth of religion is shown to have been taken up in philosophy so that there is no need for religion anymore in the modern age. Everything essential is found in modern philosophy, and the outward forms of religion—its rituals, practices, and so on—are now drained of any real meaning for the modern human spirit.

Both Althaus and Siep acknowledge that Hegel does not intend this fate for religion: he thought it would continue to exist, with Christianity as the highest expression of philosophical truth in religious form. But Althaus thinks that Hegel’s conception of religion in the modern age, as something superseded by philosophy and yet still of essential importance, is incoherent:

A religion which does not take absolute precedence over everything else is no longer religion, and a God who is no longer conceived as Creator but rather as a process of dialectical self-production has lost the decisive characteristics of the One God, is no longer what he must be if he is indeed to be God at all.<sup>27</sup>

Siep and Althaus both predicate their conclusions on the belief that Hegel *intended* to provide a Christian philosophy, and yet ultimately failed to do so. Soon we’ll look at a radically different kind of reading, according to which Hegel is not primarily a Christian thinker at all, providing us not with a defence of Christianity but with a method for discovering religion in a post-Christian age. But before we do that let’s look at Hegel

the Christian philosopher, in order to establish in what sense, if any, and despite what we've seen so far, Hegel can be called such.

### 11.3 Hegel the Christian Philosopher

For Althaus, inconsistency and incoherence characterise the *Phenomenology*, and so it is no surprise that Hegel's conclusions regarding religion are "ambivalent" and contradictory.<sup>28</sup> Pages of "rationally incomprehensible" material are inserted between the more cogent sections of Hegel's book, making it difficult to find any continuous and coherent argument of the work as a whole.<sup>29</sup> Hegel never manages to satisfactorily explain the significance of his *Phenomenology*, and since Hegel's time there have been many different interpretations not only of the various interesting passages in the book, but also of the fundamental purpose of the work as a whole.

Althaus suggests that the *Phenomenology* has the biggest "autobiographical resonance" of Hegel's works, given the well-known circumstances of its composition.<sup>30</sup> But perhaps we could call it autobiographical for another reason: the book concerns the nature of knowledge and gives an account, in a very experimental form, of Hegel's own progress through the sticky problems that troubled him on his way to formulating his conception of a philosophical system.<sup>31</sup>

Terry Pinkard reminds us that Hegel himself thought of his *Phenomenology* as a "voyage of discovery", an experimental effort to find his own way towards the beginning of the philosophical system that, he believed, modern human beings craved and required.<sup>32</sup> For Hegel, the modern world was something new that the people of his time had not yet come to terms with, and what his society lacked was a modern philosophy whose concepts were up to the task of making sense of the world in which modern individuals found themselves.<sup>33</sup>

Along with a new philosophical system, "we moderns" also need a religion that is adequate to the task of allowing us to reflect on the world around us. For Hegel, that religion was Christianity. Pinkard emphasises that, for Hegel, the Christian religion is in itself something "fundamentally different" to the philosophical reflections on it, offering something that philosophical reflection cannot, and so indispensable to modern human beings despite its being "subordinate to philosophical reflection".<sup>34</sup>

According to Pinkard, Hegel saw the Religion chapter of the *Phenomenology* as "offering an account of how and why Christianity could lay claim to be *the* modern religion".<sup>35</sup> Christianity offers doctrine and rituals that emphasise his notion of spirit as "I that is We and the We that is I"—that we are each 'minded' only to the extent that others are so 'like-minded', and it is only when we have a religion, as well as a system of philosophy, that is adequate to expressing this "philosophical view", that the spirit of the modern age can be given "full voice".<sup>36</sup>

For Stephen Houlgate, too, Hegel is a “thoroughly Christian” philosopher, who believes that Christianity is the highest possible expression of religion.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, when Hegel wrote about revealed religion, he had Christianity in mind: for example, an essential part of the discussion is the notion of Christ, as God in human form, who then dies to rise up again in spirit, as identical to the believer and no longer *other* than the believer themselves.<sup>38</sup> But those who would argue that religion must be found elsewhere than in Christianity today would not deny this: while it is true that Hegel saw Christianity as the highest expression of religion in his own day, would he still make the same claim today?

Certainly we can see in Christianity the expression, in representational form, of truth as Hegel saw it. On Houlgate’s reading, the “basic truth” that both religion and philosophy express is, for Hegel, “that reason informs the world”.<sup>39</sup> And we see this basic truth expressed in various ways in religious doctrine and practice. For example, the notion that “God is love” expresses the fact that we are preserved in the absolute, and in the life of Christ we can see the imperative that we let go of selfish desires and be guided by absolute truth.<sup>40</sup> And in the Holy Communion we see expressed in ritual form the notion that the human being and God, or the absolute, are one.<sup>41</sup> But as we saw in our discussion of Siep, Hegel’s version of Christianity is stripped of much that believing Christians—depending on their particular denomination—*might* deem to be essential. Houlgate points out some of these things himself: for example, a Hegelian Christian should not believe that Jesus literally worked miracles.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps a Christianity emptied of anything inimical to reason could be said to be quite palatable to the modern mind. But then we arrive back at Siep’s criticism of Hegel’s account of revealed religion, which led us to the statement of the problem above: if Christianity is only understood in an abstract or attenuated way, then can we call it “religion” at all? Aren’t we advocating an *ironic* acceptance of Christianity if we take away the need for the literal understanding of its dogma?

We’ve come back to a central concern of this chapter: how minimal exactly can religion be if it is to serve its function, according to Hegel? Can an abstract or even ironic version of Christianity provide the compulsion or drive to philosophy that religion is supposed to provide?

## 11.4 An Alternative to Christianity

For Burbidge, Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is an important text that demands to be re-interpreted by the readers of the present day. He tries to show that Hegel’s system was intended to be radically open to revision, and for this reason it can be used to deal convincingly with new developments in the modern world—in history and science, for example. Hegel’s method is absolute and definite, according to Burbidge, but the details of

his analysis of any particular concept are not, meaning that the system can be adapted as new contingencies emerge in every age.<sup>43</sup>

A historical contingency that has emerged in modern times is the gradual decline of Christianity, and in light of this historical fact we, as interpreters of the *Phenomenology*, must look elsewhere than Christianity to discover the place of religion, as Hegel understood the term, in modern times.

Burbidge agrees with Siep that religion, for Hegel, is necessary because human beings require both judgement *and* reconciliation: religion arises because our "moral courage" turns out not to be enough in the face of an indifferent universe, and we cannot forgive ourselves for our failings.<sup>44</sup> While moral courage and judgement are essential, forgiveness is also necessary if the individual is not to retreat into themselves in despair of the world. The human individual must reach out to others for forgiveness, and so a community is required. This community is provided by organised religion.

But Burbidge thinks that Christianity has lost its capacity, in the modern age, to provide both judgement and reconciliation: its various sects seem to have too much of one or the other but never both together. He gives examples of judgement leading to reconciliation in recent times in order to point out how these have arisen outside of a Christian context, hinting that we might need to look elsewhere than Christianity if we want to find an example of modern religion.<sup>45</sup>

For Hegel, three things are essential to religion: "cultic community", "doctrine", and "expectant experience". Judgement and reconciliation are found in a religion's cultic community: for example, in the process of confession. It's essential that any process of judgement and reconciliation be intersubjective: individual conscience alone is not enough—it's not enough to forgive *yourself*, as Hegel proves in his discussion of "conscience" in the *Phenomenology* (PS §632ff.). Hegel believed that Christianity serves its purpose, in part, because its community provides a system for the judgement and forgiveness of sins.

As well as "cultic community", we can see how "doctrine" is an important part of Christianity. There are certain things that you must believe if you want to call yourself a Christian: belief in creation, in the independence of evil beings (those who have fallen), God and man identified in one being who dies so he can become "universally present", and so on.<sup>46</sup> As we've seen, Hegel believes that these elements should be worked over in thought so that the deeper, philosophical, truth of doctrine can be revealed: for example, "God before creation is self-determining universality; the created and fallen world is particularity; reconciliation is singularity". Burbidge emphasises the reciprocity between religion and philosophy here: not only can philosophy enlighten us on the deeper meaning of religion, but religion makes philosophy possible in the first place, by illustrating logical truths with its stories.<sup>47</sup> What is essential here

is to note that the philosophical exposition of doctrine is not the doctrine itself: all that is required for *religion* is that the stories are known, learned, and recollected.

The final essential item, “expectant experience”, is something that is found in Christianity’s notion of “the death of God” and the resulting “dark night of the soul.” These concern the individual feelings of the believer and are directly experienced by the individual. According to Hegel, it is essential not only that these notions be understood as doctrine but that they also be *felt* in the heart of the individual.<sup>48</sup> Part of being a believing Christian is having known that feeling of the loss of God and the seeming impossibility of ever reaching him, never forgetting that feeling even after the truth is finally found, and perhaps even revisiting the feeling during crises of faith.<sup>49</sup> This personal agony is all part of the experience of a living religion and something Hegel thinks is essential for the modern human soul.

For Hegel, religion opens up finite individuals to the infinite. Human beings need to overcome anything that they perceive to be a limitation, and yet we are limited by death and a morally indifferent universe. For Burbidge, death and moral failure are overcome when life is given meaning by religion.<sup>50</sup>

Religion is a concrete thing that the human spirit needs, which can be seen at work in the community and felt in the human heart. And the fact that philosophy “supersedes” religion will not remove the need for actual religion. When we’re not doing philosophy, we need forgiveness and depth in our everyday lives, and this is what religion provides. From this point of view, it seems out of the question that philosophy could ever make religion redundant.

And yet, even though religion provides what is essential for human beings, the question remains: couldn’t all this be provided *without* religion? For example: if judgement and forgiveness are required, this can be provided by a secular society with good laws, without any assistance from any church. All that is required is that those who do wrong can be judged, repent, and be forgiven. The function of the “cultic community” would then be fulfilled politically, and without religion.

And for doctrine: once we have the “deeper” philosophical explanation of the various aspects of doctrine, do we need the religious stories anymore?

And “expectant experience”: isn’t even the feeling of “the long dark night” possible even in the mind of an atheist? A feeling of unattainable perfection, later attained once the individual settles down in a good and fair secular community? Many non-Christian writers have dramatized their early lives in this way: the “long dark night” will be familiar to anybody who thirsted for truth or artistic expression in their youth to find it in their mature years.

For Burbidge anyway, we cannot do without religion. The universal principles of philosophy are not enough to guide us through life. This

is because there must be some reference to singularity in any universal principle. Without the concrete and singular, universal principles collapse “into a simple identity that merely repeats its own inane formulae”.<sup>51</sup> To take “the long dark night” as an example: without a concrete notion of what it is that has been lost and must be regained, it becomes something devoid of meaning and not truly felt. Religion gives content to the long dark night, as well as to the journey of the universal, particular and singular in logic. It gives purpose to the individual that strives to be moral, so that to be moral does not mean just chasing an empty principle.

Hegel tells us that the bare result of any investigation is never enough. This is why he dislikes prefaces to philosophical works: because they tend to present the result of an investigation as if that were enough in itself. A philosophical truth can only be truly understood if the one who learns it goes through the effort of reaching it for themselves. This is what religion provides: concrete material that can be worked over by thought so that, once its “deeper” philosophical truth is arrived at, that truth can be fully understood.<sup>52</sup>

And “no conclusion is final”, for Hegel.<sup>53</sup> Though Christianity led Hegel to a particular set of philosophical concepts, that doesn't mean that we have reached the final version of philosophy. If a new religion must appear in modern society, then a new set of concepts might emerge from that, arrived at by applying Hegel's method to the world as we find it. The notion that philosophy once and for all “supersedes” religion therefore can make no sense, from a Hegelian point of view.

Religion is neither *false* nor to be understood *ironically*—unless perhaps if the form of religion in question is inadequate. And this might be the case with Christianity. It is too much to expect people today to literally believe in the resurrection of Christ, and many Christians would not expect you to. But then if this essential piece of doctrine cannot be believed in, how can the truth of religion be *felt*? And therefore we are missing two of the three essential parts of this form of religion: its doctrine and lived expectant experience.

People were once able to believe heart and soul in the doctrine and practices of Christianity and other religions, but it seems no longer possible. If modern human beings do need religion, then what is required is another set of beliefs and practices that they can wholeheartedly subscribe to. Such a new form must not merely be set of philosophical principles: it must have all the concrete functions described above: “some manner of doctrine, some kind of expectant experience and some sort of cultic community, however they find expression”.<sup>54</sup>

Burbidge suggests that other existing religions might be more compatible with the modern world view than Christianity. “The contradictions of Tao and the paradoxes of Zen”, for example, seem to fit well with modern scientific, political, and economic ways of thinking in a way that Christianity cannot.<sup>55</sup> Since religion is necessary, perhaps these would be candidates to replace the outdated forms of Christianity.

So Christianity might not be necessary, but cultic community, doctrine, and expectant experience are. The religion for *our* time would be something new, but which contains in some way those three elements. All that seems certain is that this new religion *cannot* be a return to Christianity, since few belong to that community anymore, no one can be expected to believe the truth of Christianity's stories, and few would be inspired by the Bible to find their own long dark night of the soul.

In the present day, it is the believer in Christianity who must fall into contradiction and irony, finding it impossible to square their beliefs with the age they live in. But if Burbidge is right, the notion of religion is not altogether doomed. There is no reason that meaning and rationality cannot be found in another kind of community, doctrine, and meaningful experience, even if such seems to be lacking for the moment.

But is such a view really compatible with Hegel? If religion is essential to the modern human experience, how can it be true that we're going through a period of history without religion? Burbidge seems to suggest that however little religion is explicitly present in society, there will always exist those three religion elements in some form: cultic community, doctrine, and expectant experience. There will always be some need for the reciprocity of judgement and forgiveness; there will always be some dominant metaphysical beliefs about the nature of the universe; and there will always be a story of loss and eventual fulfilment that is played out in the individual human mind. So where can we find these today?

## 11.5 Conclusion: Philosophy and Religion

For George di Giovanni, the interesting question for Hegelians today is not whether absolute knowing replaces religion and thereby makes it redundant. For Hegel, as we have seen, both religion *and* philosophy are required in the modern age: religion, because it is necessary for human beings to *feel* as well as to think the deepest truths of their existence; philosophy, because truths known through symbols and images must be "demythologised" so that their true content can be made explicit.

The question is not whether religion is necessary in the world today. The question instead is: since religion *is* necessary today, as it has always been, then where is it? Or to put it another way: "what would count as religion in a post-Christian culture?"<sup>56</sup> Giovanni tells us that Hegel can give us no clear answer to this question.

He writes that, for Hegel, religion is "existentially necessary", meaning that, at the very least, religion *had to have existed* in order for human spirit to arrive at absolute knowing. As we've seen from Burbidge: religion illustrates and makes us feel truths that are then worked over in thought and understood as philosophical concepts.

As philosophers, "we" have a concept of religion itself, which is based on our own experience of religion.<sup>57</sup> And this concept of religion is

unpacked so that we arrive at the concept of absolute knowing. It would have been impossible to reach the insights of philosophy without the lived experience of the truth found in religion. As we saw in Burbidge: the Trinity, the resurrection, and so on illustrate important truths about the universal, the particular, and the singular.

But religion is “existentially necessary” not just in the sense that it has to have existed, but also in the sense that it must continue to exist in some form. The truth must continue to be *felt* by individuals today so they as individuals can make their own journey towards the philosophical conception of truth since, as we have seen, truth is found in the whole, for Hegel, and arriving at a meaningful result requires that you understand how that result has been arrived at. And so some form of religious experience must continue to exist if philosophy and the highest realisation of spirit are to be possible. Modern individuals need to have the opportunity to work through their own religious experiences in thought, in order to discover philosophical insights for themselves.

As we've seen in Burbidge, religion for Hegel must be more than just belief and faith—it must involve some form of ritual.<sup>58</sup> And it must be a “genuine expression of the human heart”: though religion *turns out* to be explainable in conceptual terms, it must not be something derived from philosophy but from a genuinely felt human need that can later be logically unpacked.<sup>59</sup> Christianity once met these criteria—containing the aspects of cult, doctrine, and felt experience—but now it has served its purpose and can be “relegated to memory”.<sup>60</sup> We must look elsewhere for living religion. But where?

We've seen that, for Hegel, “religion” is found in any culture that has a concept of “the highest” and of “genuine reality”. (See the discussion of Siep above.) This is what makes religion compatible with, and a precursor to, philosophy: they both express the same “basic truth” that “reason informs the world”, in other words that reality is *truly* understood where we dig a little deeper, or raise our minds a little higher, to find reason at work within it. (See Houlgate.) Religion gives “depth” to experience, the notion of a deeper and more genuine meaning, which is then taken up in philosophy. (See Burbidge.)

Religion must be more than this too: apart from this deeper feeling that religion brings, and the dogma that it expresses, it must also provide a “cultic community” that can hear and forgive sins, so that the fallible individual can be reconciled with the community (Burbidge).

The problem we're faced with when trying to make use of a Christian philosopher like Hegel is the suspicion not only that Christianity is no longer able to meet these requirements as a religion, but also that it has *never* been able to meet these criteria in the modern age, since Hegel's day or even earlier than that. Looking at it this way, Hegel would have been someone who found the Christianity of his day to be already a “form of life ... waning and fading into greyness” and who wanted to revive it



in his own time.<sup>61</sup> But this was doomed from the start, and he ended up with a conception of religion that lacked a true sense of God as the highest, and lacked a dogma that could claim to be the one true and genuine interpretation of reality, and so even on his own terms could not really be called a “religion”. (See Althaus.)

We’ve seen that Hegel’s *Phenomenology* can be viewed as a “voyage of discovery”, an experimental work that maps out Hegel’s own personal journey, starting with his concerns about the culture of his age and ending with absolute knowing. (See Pinkard and Althaus.) Rather than treating this text as the final word on the nature of religion, it ought to inspire us to make journeys of our own: starting with the truths of our own culture and trying to find our own path to philosophical knowledge.

This would not mean denying the *importance* of a text such as the *Phenomenology* for this enterprise: the concept of religion found within it—as denoting a culture where a notion of a highest and genuine reality is felt within the human individual and reflected in the community—is essential for helping us to establish where religion might be found in the world today. As Burbidge insists, Hegel’s *concepts* might be expected to transform over time, but his *method* should be taken to be universal. If Hegelians are looking for religion in the modern world, they must apply Hegel’s method in order to find it. While this might mean taking Hegel’s concept of religion to task, this should only be done by examining his arguments and applying the method for ourselves in order to see whether or not we reach the same conclusions as he did. My suspicion is that, when we do this, Hegel’s broad sense of what “religion” means will remain intact, even as we move away from the notion of “Hegel the Christian philosopher”.

Jean-Luc Nancy writes of how the “decomposition” of Christianity has led to its “deconstruction”.<sup>62</sup> With the power of Christianity fading, we cannot just turn our backs on it as if it never happened. We must look at what remains of it in our world, and in the cultures on which it had an impact, and see what is left that might belong to the religion of *our* time. Deconstruction is a philosophical enterprise, but its object in this case would be the actually existing practices and beliefs of a people living in the shadow of Christianity, who still, implicitly or explicitly, share beliefs and practices derived from it. It is possible that, in the mixture of these old beliefs with new influences, the character of modern religion might be found, alive and well, in the human heart.

## Notes

- 1 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative* (trans. Jason Smith and Steven Miller) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 3.
- 2 References to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* give the paragraph numbers as found in G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. A.V. Miller) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

- 3 Ludwig Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 202.
- 4 See also Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 217.
- 5 Siep "Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" pp. 2, 252.
- 6 Ibid., p. 200.
- 7 Ibid., p. 202.
- 8 Ibid., p. 203.
- 9 Ibid., p. 192.
- 10 Ibid., p. 207.
- 11 Ibid., p. 208.
- 12 Ibid., p. 209.
- 13 Ibid., p. 212.
- 14 Ibid., p. 212.
- 15 See also Ibid., p. 219.
- 16 Ibid., p. 219.
- 17 Ibid., pp. 222–223.
- 18 Ibid., p. 223.
- 19 Ibid., p. 227.
- 20 Ibid., p. 227.
- 21 Ibid., p. 239.
- 22 Ibid., p. 239.
- 23 cf. Ibid., p. 220.
- 24 Ibid., pp. 225, 240.
- 25 Ibid., p. 221.
- 26 Horst Althaus, *Hegel: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 103.
- 27 Ibid., p. 103.
- 28 Ibid., pp. 102–103
- 29 Ibid., p. 96.
- 30 Ibid., p. 95.
- 31 Ibid., pp. 95–96.
- 32 Pinkard "Hegel: A Biography", pp. 203–204.
- 33 Ibid., p. 204.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 216–217
- 35 Ibid., p. 217.
- 36 Ibid., p. 217.
- 37 Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth, and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 272.
- 38 Ibid., pp. 97–98.
- 39 Ibid., p. 244.
- 40 Ibid., pp. 247, 248.
- 41 Ibid., p. 257.
- 42 Ibid., p. 248.
- 43 John W. Burbidge, *Hegel on Logic and Religion: The Reasonableness of Christianity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 7.
- 44 Ibid., p. 125.
- 45 Ibid., p. 151.
- 46 Ibid., pp. 148–149.
- 47 Ibid., p. 149.
- 48 Ibid., pp. 142–143.
- 49 Ibid., pp. 144–145.
- 50 Ibid., pp. 120–121, 146.

- 51 Ibid., p. 3.
- 52 Ibid., p. 129.
- 53 Ibid., p. 130.
- 54 Ibid., p. 153.
- 55 Ibid., p. 151.
- 56 George di Giovanni, "Religion, History, and Spirit in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*" in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (ed. Kenneth R. Westphal) pp. 226–245 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), p. 243.
- 57 Ibid., p. 226.
- 58 Ibid., p. 227.
- 59 Ibid., p. 243.
- 60 Ibid., pp. 242–243.
- 61 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith) (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 2; cf. Siep, "Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*".
- 62 Nancy, "Dis-Enclosure", p. 2.

# 12 Hegel's Art-Religion in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and Beyond

*Sven-Olov Wallenstein*

The place and function of art in Hegel's philosophy can be understood in several ways. On one hand, at least from the early 1800s onward, he consistently opposes the Romantics and the idea that philosophical rationality was essentially connected to art. Philosophy, or science, may have art as one of its objects, but it is not itself in need of art for its internal articulation; philosophy is the labor of the concept, not a play of aesthetic ideas, whose *raison d'être* is precisely to be sublated into reason. On other hand, while in Hegel's earlier writings from Bern and Frankfurt before the turn of the century, the capacity to found an ethical order, a *Sittlichkeit*, was ascribed first and foremost to religion, it was also modeled on an art understood in the general and expanded sense in which the state itself can be taken as a work of art, as in the case of the Greek *polis*.

If Hegel's analysis of the ethical order began with a study of early Christianity, the aim was nevertheless to address the present and to retrieve a religion that would bring together Kant's practical reason and the ideals of the French Revolution so as to point ahead to a unified world. Hegel, however, retreated from this idea: Christianity and the church were too remote from everyday life for them to be able to produce a true reconciliation. Hegel instead turned to the Greeks and to an idealized and aestheticized view of the *polis*, which now appeared as the place where reason and freedom had once been truly realized.<sup>1</sup> The beautiful religion of the Greeks could, in this sense, be taken as an ideal in the full sense, and Hegel explicitly defined the Greek *polis* as a work of art.<sup>2</sup> The city-state was instituted by the work of art, but it was also itself a work, a harmonious unity in which the political and the aesthetic dimensions were united.

A decisive influence for Hegel's turn to the Greeks seems to have come from Hölderlin. Together they developed these ideas in terms of what they called "popular education" (*Volkserziehung*) to the point that they even planned a division of labor between them so that Hölderlin would deal with art and Hegel with religion.<sup>3</sup> Hegel now systematically opposed the Greek beautiful religion to the "positivity" of the Christian religion, where this education had been transformed into a transcendent law and

a merely external cult, and Hölderlin's *Hyperion* and the successive versions of the tragedy *Empedocles* could be taken as attempts to work this out in the literary form of a "modern tragedy."<sup>4</sup> The background for this was undoubtedly Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education*, but in asking the question of how the idea of reason could be made truly effective in the contemporary world characterized by division and sundering, they wanted to go beyond the merely "beautiful appearance" that Schiller proposed as the domain of art.

A dense version of this vision can be found in the "System Program of German Idealism" (written late 1796 or early 1797). The text exists in a fragmented state, and its author remains unknown; Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin have all been suggested as likely candidates, but contemporary consensus is that Hegel is the author.<sup>5</sup> This fragment brings together philosophy, religion, morality, and politics in terms of a new "mythology," in which abstract ideas should be given sensible form and the merely externally associated limbs of the social body be joined together as in a living organism. The ideas of practical reason, the anonymous author suggests, need to be brought together with a speculative or grand physics so that they cease to be merely unattainable ideals, just as the state, previously considered as an external machine,<sup>6</sup> must be transcended in direction of a higher idea whereby we all can be united and perceive our own individuality as deriving from a higher principle of reason, which is to be found in the idea of beauty, as it has been bequeathed to us by Plato and Kant.<sup>7</sup>

But Hegel soon withdrew from the heights of the aesthetic idea. Unlike Schelling, who at least for a while assumed the possibility of reunifying the world through a work of art, which he saw prefigured in Dante's *Divine Comedy*,<sup>8</sup> in which poetry and philosophy were fused in a way that still plays the role of a model for us moderns, Hegel came to distrust the Romantic vision, and from the 1801 *Differenzschrift* onward, it is philosophy and conceptual thought which for him holds the key to the reconciliation of the modern world. The short essay from 1800, the year before the *Differenzschrift* (and three years before Schelling's Dante essay, which thus can be read as an implicit rejoinder to Hegel) on Schiller's drama *Wallenstein* points to the fact that there can be no such thing as a modern epic: modernity is irrevocably prosaic, it does not allow for a return to religious or aesthetic ideals, and the heroism of Schiller's protagonist leads him to suffer shipwreck against the disenchantment of the modern world, against the "prose of relations" (*Prosa der Verhältnisse*), of which Hegel would later speak in his analysis of the modern novel in the Berlin lectures on aesthetics.<sup>9</sup> This surely does not mean that art would simply have become useless, only that its role can no longer be to give a unified representation of the world; it can hold up a mirror to us that shows a broken reflection, but the true unity of self and image can only come through a second-order reflection *on this reflection*, that is, by *speculation*, which is the true task of philosophy.

Hermann Glockner's thesis that there is something like an "aesthetic foundation"<sup>10</sup> for Hegel's system, as this develops from the early Jena writings onward, would thus be difficult to uphold. For Glockner, it was the impact of Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education* that provided the outline for the system, and its construction was to be carried out in the element of the aesthetic. This thesis can be taken to imply that the system itself has an aesthetic quality or that it is based on aesthetics as its first (chronological or logical) part. But it can also be read as a more open proposal, that is, as a question that bears on Hegel's actual use of artworks, how they are intertwined with the logical structure of his thought, and to what extent they are essential to its very articulation. The sublation of art does not erase art but rather provides it with a function inside the system, whose first version we find in the *Phenomenology*.

### 12.1 The Dual Place of Art in the *Phenomenology*

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel draws on several of his earlier analyses and inscribes them in an overarching structure, which is the path of spirit coming to itself, or the "experience of consciousness" as it gradually comes to overcome its distance towards the world, and to understand that substance must be understood as subject and, inversely, the subject as substance. The questions would in this context be the following: What happens to the earlier understanding of art in the phenomenological model? Is it simply rejected and relegated to a prehistory supposed to have been overcome in the System of Science? Against this, one can note that references to artworks are ubiquitous in Hegel's text. They are, however, always anonymous, as if constituting a kind of tacit knowledge woven into the fabric of the experience of consciousness and indeed always more or less inexact; Hegel paraphrases and translates from memory; he cuts and edits at will but always with the intent of integrating the references into the movement of his own discourse.

On one hand, art is an *object of analysis*, and its role seems circumscribed within the logic of a narrative that treats it in terms of its capacity to provide us with an adequate presentation of the movement of the concept. In the *Phenomenology*, art thus gradually emerges from out of its intertwining with religion until it reaches the state of "absolute art"—and this is where it appears to end, in Greek comedy and a momentary state of happiness, both unprecedented and seemingly without sequel, where man feels completely at home in the world but at the price of his own substance. In this, the *Phenomenology* can be taken to affirm the need for philosophy to overcome art and would prefigure some of the later statements in the Berlin lectures on art as a thing of the past, something that must be superseded by philosophy as an adequate way of grasping the concept in the medium of thought itself. But, as we will see, the thesis that art would belong to the past just as much opens onto

another understanding, which would be art's proper modernity: disengaging from religion, art enters into the sphere of aesthetic autonomy where its connections to philosophy not only remain to be decided, which is a possible interpretation of the Berlin lectures, but also can be read between the lines in the *Phenomenology*.

Traces of this other conception might be found in the *Phenomenology*, which sometimes deploys artworks as something that we, following Jean Starobinski's discussion of Freud,<sup>11</sup> could call "operators." By using this term, Starobinski suggests that Oedipus and Hamlet (both of which are, in fact, crucial references also for Hegel, the former in the *Phenomenology*, the latter in the Berlin lectures on aesthetics) are not just objects for Freud's discourse but are also more like sieves or epistemological grids that constitute integral parts of the project of psychoanalysis. Similarly, we could say that in Hegel, artworks often appear to operate as models for thought at strategically located junctures in the text. The idea of the "operator" means that they are located halfway between *concepts*, which as such would be indispensable, and *illustrations*, which would be merely sensuous and particular representations of properly conceptual structures. They belong to the sphere of the imagination, of the *Mitte*, which since Kant had always been given the role of unifying the architectural whole, not as a foundation or a telos but as an interstitial element whose exact place will be difficult to decide once and for all, as can be seen in many passages in the third Critique.

This use of art as a philosophical *tool*, which, in fact, draws Hegel close to some of Schelling's ideas in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) about art as an "organon,"<sup>12</sup> while not simply contradicting the later claims in the Berlin lectures that art is a thing of the past with respect to its highest aim, nevertheless opens up the possibility of a different type of exchange between art and philosophy that constitutes one of the most vital aspects of the Hegelian heritage in contemporary philosophy of art. This, however, requires that we make the first distinction—heuristic, to be sure, and the difference between the two cannot easily be determined in the text—between art as an object of philosophy, which can be treated systematically, and an art that somehow insinuates itself into philosophy and informs its discourse in a more oblique way.

Thus, in the *Phenomenology*, beginning with the second section of the chapter on Reason, the literary references multiply: the paraphrased quote from Goethe's first version of *Faust* that opens the analysis of "Pleasure and necessity," in which Hegel points to the contradiction in Faust's desire to achieve instant gratification and fuse with the other, while still retaining the autonomy of self-consciousness; the following step, which analyzes "the law of the heart," weaves together references to Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Héloïse*, Schiller's play *The Robbers*, Jacobi's *Woldemar*, and perhaps also Hölderlin's *Hyperion*. Later we encounter the unfortunate Don Quixote, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, and undoubtedly also many other scattered references.

In the following chapter on Spirit, we could trace a logical development organized around three successive readings of literary examples; here, I focus on the first two, for which the literary sources are more readily identifiable and their operative function transpires more clearly. The first section, "True spirit, ethical life," which constitutes a parallel to the later parts of the section on "Art-Religion," draws on Greek tragedy, and particularly Sophocles's *Antigone*, which Hegel quotes in a typically free manner, in order to establish the irreducible conflict of the power of the family and the netherworld, incarnated in the figure of Antigone, and the power of the state and the *polis*, incarnated in the figure of Creon.<sup>13</sup>

If the Greek *polis* can be taken as a work of art, as an aesthetic-political unity, which Hegel indeed had claimed in his earlier writings, then the action performed by a work like *Antigone* amounts to the tearing apart of this beautiful unity, the revealing of its irrevocable *disunity*. The properly tragic dimension of tragedy is that both parties—in this case, Creon and Antigone—are, in fact, right, and both of them simply fulfill the duty, the law, human or divine, which has been allotted to them, without being able to see the justification for the actions on the part of the other. This incapacity to see the perspective of the other is what brings down the beautiful totality of the *polis* and of Greek ethical life and when the spheres of family and state have come to be opposed, the process of disintegration is irreversible: old and young are pitted against each other, the state must attempt to undermine the authority and inwardness of the family, while the family, and more precisely femininity, the "polity's eternal irony" (PS §474),<sup>14</sup> overtakes the government's universal purpose and transforms it into a private family enterprise.

We can here note how the example, in fact, orients the logic of the narrative. The account of the equilibrium between human and divine law, man and woman, state and family, provided in the section "The Ethical World, the Human and Divine Law, Man and Woman," which precedes the references to *Antigone*, seems already to be structured by the analysis of Sophocles, in its highlighting two features that will become the key issue in the play: the family that provides the death of the individual with a higher meaning through the ritual of burial and joins the earthly and the chthonic order and the inner structure of the family, where Hegel stresses the relation between brother and sister as a pure recognition, untainted by any desire. Particularly the latter claim seems somewhat ad hoc as a characteristic of Greek ethical life in general, unless we grasp that Sophocles's play tacitly works as a grid through that this ethical life can appear in a particular way and that the literary text intervenes not only as an illustration of a thesis established independently of it but also, in fact, structures the claim in advance.

The second section, "Spirit Alienated From Itself: Cultural Maturation" (*Bildung*), cites Diderot's dialogue novel *Rameau's Nephew* in order to show the vertiginous reevaluation of all values brought about by the



completion of maturation on the eve of the revolution. Just as in the case of *Antigone*, I would argue, the literary example directs the argument in the subsequent analysis of cultural maturation. We must first note that Hegel does not understand *Bildung* in the sense of a culture acquired through a reading of a certain set of canonical texts but as a progressive estrangement and externalization of the self in which the individual must shed his natural determination, all of which lead to a kind of nihilism, even though this is a term that Hegel himself does not use, nor, it must be added, could it have been available to him, since it emerges (if we here disregard its early use in Jacobi, in which the term is intended as a critique of the atheist implications of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*), out of a certain nineteenth-century reading of the Hegelian completion of metaphysics. This analysis of *Bildung* forms a part of the most entangled and layered sections of the *Phenomenology*, and here I can only briefly trace a particular line that ends in Diderot, although I believe that it has bearings on the whole.

Hegel suggests a developing opposition between state power, substance, or the collective order, and the individual's quest for personal wealth. These two are however only opposed on the surface, and, drawing on his reading of British political economy, Hegel shows how the individual in his pursuit of his own pleasure and gain in fact might contribute to the prosperity of the whole. On the basis of this dialectical opposition Hegel then proceeds to analyze the emergence of an increasingly complex social order, within which the individual understands state power both as his own essence and as that which deprives him of individuality, in a process that takes us from the feudal order through the arrival of the absolutist state and up to the revolution. From my perspective, it is crucial that Hegel systematically accounts for this development as a series of what could be called language games—from the “language<sup>15</sup> of the counsel” (PS §504) to the “heroism of flattery” (PS §510) and the “empty name” (PS §511). These steps, through which, on one hand, state power comes to be concentrated in a point that eventually escapes definition since it is situated at the limit of language, and on the other hand, wealth develops into an independent system, no doubt characterized by an opposite but equally empty verbosity, generate a torn, split, and lacerated world, which is expressed in the “language of laceration” (*die Sprache der Zerrissenheit*), which Hegel understands as the “perfected language of this entire world of cultural maturation as well as its true existing spirit” (PS §519). Now, this language is precisely what Hegel sees as deployed in *Rameau's Nephew*, which can be understood as the completion of cultural maturation in a vertiginous reversal of all values, and at the end of the *ancien régime*, it already appears to herald both the Marxist analysis of universal commodification and Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism: everything is for sale, all values can easily be converted into their opposite, and the only reasonable stance is to understand and affirm the complete bankruptcy of reason.

Now, could we not say that the inevitable conflict of Creon and Antigone, and even more so the inversions and reversals of Diderot's dialogue on the eve of the contemporary age, are indeed akin to the movement of dialectics itself? Not only do they portray the necessity of *Zerrissenheit* and the movement of *Verkehrung*, but they, in fact, also provide Hegel with two of the most powerful ways to think dialectics: the idea of a necessary and determinate contradiction and the possibility of an infinite negativity.

And the third and final section, "Spirit Certain of Itself: Morality," in its analysis of the "beautiful soul," looks at a series of novels, probably Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Jacobi's *Woldemar*, and Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. And then, of course, at the very end of Absolute Knowledge, we find the slightly adapted quote from Schiller's *Die Freundschaft*, which points to the necessity of spirit going out of itself to the *contingency* of history in order to come back as *grasped* history. These two forms, Hegel writes, introducing the final quote by a dramatic dash,<sup>16</sup> together constitute "the Golgotha of absolute spirit, the actuality, the truth, the certainty of its throne, without which it would be lifeless and alone; only – *Out of the chalice of this realm of spirits / Foams forth to him his infinity*" (PS §810).

Turning to the systematic treatment, we will encounter a perspective that at first might seem unequivocally opposed. Here, art is inscribed in a trajectory that appears largely historical, that leads from a beginning to an end located already in the transition from Greek antiquity to Christianity after which art no longer seems to play an essential role. But as already noted, the two roles of art, as operator and as an object of systematic analysis, often intersect, and the distinction should only be taken as provisional. The systematic conceptual development worked out in the analysis of art-religion had, as it were, already been disseminated throughout the text, and the two functions in this sense had been taken to support each other.

## 12.2 Art as an Object of Analysis

The treatment of art that we find in the section titled "The Art-Religion" (*Die Kunstreligion*), is located in the middle of the chapter on religion, which is followed by the final chapter on "Absolute knowing," in which the movement of the *Phenomenology* comes to an end. Art is here dealt with in connection to—even subordinate to—the analysis of religion. In later works, as the *Encyclopedia* system begins to emerge, Hegel would separate the two, with art as the first and religion as the second moment in absolute spirit, succeeded by philosophy. It is inside the architecture of this system that the Berlin lectures on aesthetics find their place, which also means that the conception of the role of art will shift. In the later lectures, the densely written comments in the *Phenomenology* will be

taken apart and split up in extended analyses that not only incorporate a wealth of empirical details but also extend the chronological scope to the present. Here, too, art's role as disclosure of the absolute appears to be located in the past, even though Hegel, in the end, leaves the question of the future of art open.<sup>17</sup> This more detailed treatment in the lectures can thus be read as an explication of the tacit assumptions of the *Phenomenology*, and if it remains ambiguous, it is because this was already the case in the previous work.

In the *Phenomenology*, the analysis of religion takes us from its first and simplest forms, where art has not yet appeared, through Greece, where it does appear and forms the strange compound "Kunstreligion" (which Hegel sometimes even calls "artificial religion," "künstliche Religion", a religion, as it were, based in artifacts), up to Christianity, where art recedes into the sphere of an interiorizing memory (*Er-Innerung*). As we will see, this movement presents us with the first stirrings of art, its flowering, and then its withering in a historical sequence that forms a part of the other historicizing schema that gradually is set in place, notably from the section on Spirit onward, where we are no longer faced with "shapes only of consciousness" but with "shapes of a world" (PS §440).

In Greece and the art-religion, then, spirit truly becomes an artist, but it does so on the basis of a fusion of art and religion. In the later Berlin lectures, Hegel would more clearly separate art and religion and present an infinitely more detailed analysis of the individual arts that correlates them with historical phases. In this later version, the Greek moment contains the sensible appearing of the idea, and freestanding sculpture constitutes the paradigmatic form, whereas the subsequent Christian moment ascribes this role to painting, although art *as such*, as the presentation of truth, has been relegated to a secondary position in relation to religion. In the *Phenomenology*, these different developmental lines are still intertwined, and Greek art is understood as finally, in comedy, ushering in the moment of an "absolute art," which will be just as condemned to disappearance as the Greek *Sittlichkeit*.

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel discerns three steps in this development, the *abstract*, the *living*, and the *spiritual* work of art, all of which can be understood as the gradual emergence of self-consciousness and the becoming-human of the divine powers. When this process is completed, art will have performed its role—at least to the extent that is caught up in the compound "Art-Religion"—and fade, together with the Greek gods, and the systematic treatment comes to an end.

In order to grasp the logic of this trajectory, we, however, need to backtrack to the preceding moment, "Natural Religion," in which many of the features then would eventually coalesce into art proper appear as scattered moments. This the phase of what Hegel later, in other contexts, would call "pre-art" (*Vorkunst*),<sup>18</sup> an art that precedes itself, points ahead to what it will eventually become.

- A. *Natural religion.* The first step takes us back to “natural religion” and the “luminous essence” (*das Lichtwesen*). As in all analogous initiating steps, spirit is here first only its concept, not yet unfolded, and as opposed to the daylight it is “the night of its essence,” the “creative secrets of its birth” that still has its own “revelation” (*Offenbarung*) within itself.

The historical reference remains imprecise, and many suggestions have been offered. Walter Jaeschke has claimed that Hegel is thinking of Jewish religion;<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang Bonsiepen has opted for ancient Persia as the reference.<sup>20</sup> The historical reference to the following section on plants and animals is even more diffuse, and both Egypt and India have been suggested, whereas the Artisan places us firmly in Egypt—all of which indicates the extent to which Hegel here too, in what appears as a historical narrative, subordinates empirical history to the systematic intention.

In the first diremption that occurs, we are, in the retroactive move by which the dialectic retraces and sublates its earlier steps, returned to the moment of sense-certainty (or, we might add, to the immediacy and indetermination of being in the *Logic*) that opens the whole trajectory of the book, although now as a moment filled with spirit, which on another level also echoes the position of the master in the analysis of self-consciousness. This is a shape, Hegel continues, that yet lacks a shape, the shape of shapelessness (*Gestalt der Gestaltlosigkeit*) or a formless substantiality that belongs to the luminous essence. In otherness, luminosity becomes obscurity, and in the movement that makes the two sides pass over into each other (which Hegel here skips over quickly), there emerge streams of fire that, in turn, consume the shape. Difference in luminous essence propagates itself in existence and fuses with nature, but in this, it “wanders here and there without any constancy, sometimes enlarging its boundaries to a measureless extent, and then, in its own sublimity, it brings its own beauty, which it has heightened into splendor, into dissolution” (PS §686). No artworks are yet mentioned here, but in the later Berlin lectures on aesthetics, Hegel will connect this sublimity to, for instance, Hebrew poetry or to various early forms of proto-architectural intimations. Form and non-form, measure and non-measure pass over into each other without attaining a stable identity.

The content of luminous essence thus explicated remains fleeting, it is a series of examples that exempt themselves (Hegel here plays in on the word *Bei-Spiel*, as in the chapter on sense-certainty) from the appearance in their very appearing, a light that rises up without setting; it is a pure East, which, in the schema that organizes Hegel's philosophy of religion, constitutes something like a pure movement of occidentalization, a pure expenditure that does not return into itself in order to become a subject. The attributes that appear do so only in

order to disappear, like so many evanescent names for the One (which in terms of the repetition of the first stages of self-consciousness would be like a master recognized by no one, whose deeds remain without result), messengers without a will of their own. Pure light, Hegel writes, disperses its simplicity in an infinity of forms, and sacrifices itself for the sake of particularity; the pure beginning would be like a *gift of being* or an expenditure of luminosity that offers shape to shapes while still remaining in the domain of the shapeless. Jacques Derrida links the idea of the gift that would subtend the phenomenological movement while still remaining unthought to Heidegger's notions of "it gives" (*es gibt*) and the "gift of presencing" (*Gabe des Anwesens*).<sup>21</sup> For Derrida, these passages signal something like the condition of possibility for Hegel's discourse, a limit that remains unacknowledged while yet insistent at certain key junctures in the text.<sup>22</sup>

Now, this necessary shaping first occurs in the subsequent and slightly enigmatic section, "Plant and Animal," in the form of pantheism and a peaceful religion of flowers, which soon passes over into the violence of the religion of animals. The first step parallels the early stage of perception, a "motionless stable existence" (PS §689), which, however, soon enters into a hostile movement; the innocence of flowers, like a moment of beauty and repose, is overtaken by the seriousness of warring life in the religion of animals and a destructive being-for-itself. Death, hate, and negativity, seemingly absent from the calm of flowers, become a constitutive feature, which in the realm of the social world translates into a "multitude of thinned-out and unsociable spirits of different peoples" (*ibid.*) fighting with each other, represented by specific totemistic animal shapes without any consciousness of universality.

Out of this destructive violence, which "wears itself out" (PS §690), Hegel writes, another shape, or rather shape as such, emerges: the form of the object, the thing, together with the one who works and gives form, takes precedence over the laceration of animal spirit. Work produces things opposed to consciousness, in which it must seek to find itself again, which will be the underlying substructures of art. This is the final moment in natural religion, which is also the introduction of the first recognizable artistic agent: the "Artisan" (*der Werkmeister*).

His work is still instinctual like that of bees forming their cells, and he does not yet grasp his own thought, which appears as external, in the abstract form of understanding not yet permeated by spirit. These are the rectilinear and planar shapes that we find in pyramids and obelisks, where the irrational and incommensurable ratios of circular shapes have been straightened out.<sup>23</sup> But since the works produced are not yet spiritual, they must receive this quality from the outside, as in the case of the pyramids, which enclose a deceased spirit placed within them, or as themselves an inert body that must be given voice

by the rising sun, as Hegel would later see exemplified in Herodotus's description of the colossi of Memnon.

The task will be to overcome this separation of inner and outer, body and soul, in a mutual interpenetration. At first, the two sides are, however, fused so that they appear in a thing that preserves the difference between the inner and the surrounding shell, just the artisan does not appear as such but remains as inner, concealed essence. The artisan's work relates to the outer shell, an external reality shaped by the abstract form of understanding, which, however, gradually pushes the earlier organic, plant-like forms of pantheism outward, into the sphere of the ornament, which at the same time draws them closer to the form of thought, making them into an animated, as it were a second-order roundness that is the origin of freestanding architecture.

This housing also contains the particular, but as we have seen, it does so as the housing of the dead. Similarly, in the trajectory towards subjectivity, it reactivates the animal shape in the guise of the sphinx, and the thought expressed on the level of signs comes across as hieroglyphs devoid of sound, or, once again with implicit reference to the Memnon colossi, as the soundless form that requires the sun to begin sounding, and yet remains only sound (*Klang*) and not language. Inner and outer remain separated, the outer only indicates the inner, covers it, while this inner is still only a simple obscurity.

Since the stele shaped in human form does not let the soul appear, and the soul cannot attain articulation, what the artisan produces is a kind of intermediary entities, and these "ambiguous essences are riddles to themselves, are the conscious wrestling with the unconscious, the simple inner with the multiply shaped outer, the darkness of thought paired with the clarity of expression." Their language is one of depth but not clarity, "the language of a deeper, but scarcely comprehensible, wisdom" (PS §697). In this enigmatic exchange, the work of the artisan faces the interiority of a self-consciousness that expresses itself, spirit encounters spirit in the diremption of consciousness, and the shapes borrowed from nature gradually fade, or are cast down, as in the case of the sphinx defeated by Oedipus. Spirit, so Hegel concludes this preparatory section, has eventually become an *artist*.

- B. *The Art-Religion*. The artisan has now left the confusion of thought and nature behind. He is transformed into a "spiritual laborer" (PS §699) and the forms that unfold in the art-religion will henceforth be connected to the ethical sphere, to *Sittlichkeit* and not to nature, and in this, it also relates to individuals, just as the artist will eventually emerge as a particular subject with a proper name. At first, the individual however rests in the whole and has not yet grasped its limitless freedom, which will occur at the end of this section, with the "extreme

of self-consciousness grasping itself as essence" (PS §701). This is the place of "absolute art" (PS §702) beyond which Christianity will take leave of art as such and transform it into a memory.

1. In the first step of Art-Religion, "[t]he abstract work of art," Hegel takes us from sculpture to the hymn, and finally to the cult, and *abstraction* here means that the constitutive moments of art have yet not formed an integral unity. The shape is still there as a thing, the difference between generality and individuality persists, as in archaic sculpture, whereby the young boy and girl, the *kouros* and *koure*, signal generality but do not display any individual features.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the architectural housing transcends the crystal of understanding and the enclosing of the dead and liberates itself from the imitation of nature.<sup>25</sup> Humans split off from animals, as do the gods; gods and humans begin to draw closer to each other, yet the gods still appear in a natural element as an obscure memory of the unethical realm of the titans, the old gods.

This shape stands opposed to self-consciousness, and the artist does not yet recognize himself in the work, which means that the work is not truly animated; doing and thinghood are not united. The proper appearance of the god, as well as of the artwork, requires a higher element than the merely external space of sculpture, and this will be *language*, which in the forms of the hymn and the oracle, each in their respective ways, transcend the mere sounding and riddle-like quality of the Artisan's works. In the hymn, self-consciousness becomes pure thought or devotion (*Andacht*), an interiority that yet has an external existence, a communal existence in the many coming together. At the other end, we find the language of the oracle, a foreign self-consciousness, simple phrases with sublime content that appear trivial to the self-consciousness undergoing formation. The problem of divination appears, and if the artwork transcends thinghood through language, it also gives language a dense opacity that we find in the cult. Here the divine and the thing come together, continuing the work of the hymn in which the soul was led onto a path of purification and formation. The secrecy of rituals eventually becomes public, and in the act of sacrifice, the abstraction of essence is sublated in a movement by which the gods achieve a tangible presence and a proximity to humans. The house of the god is now opened to the humans and to the people that celebrate themselves in the cult and the sacrifice, whereby the fruits that are consumed are at once a spiritualization of matter and a descent of the gods. The cult joins together the subjective interiority of worship and the external space of sculpture and makes art into a common and collective event.

2. In the second moment, the *living work of art*, Hegel traces a development leading from the Mysteries to the Olympic Games and to the emergence of human universality. This is the feast that man gives in the honor of himself, whereby the human figure takes the place of archaic sculpture, and the beautiful body of the athlete or the fighter receives the worship earlier bestowed on the statue. Once more, however, the equilibrium between inner and outer is lacking, and this time, too, language proves to be the medium in which it is to be achieved, which, in the next subsection, will take us into the third and final moment.

The cult brings the ethical substance and god together; what appears is no longer luminous essence but the general essence of the people, with the consciousness that the god that they worship is theirs, although not yet as concrete individuality, which will be the case only in Christianity. In this communality, the artist again recedes into the background, and it is nature that comes to the fore, although not as an obscure power but as consumed in the form of food and drink. If essence becomes a mystery, it is still a secret but now as an essence that can be felt, tasted, smelled, and desired. This, Hegel writes with reference to the Dionysian cult, is a life that “roams about as a throng of madly rapturous women, the unrestrained revel of nature in a self-conscious shape” (PS §723). This frenzied agitation has, however, to be made calmer; it must enter into an object, a work, which at this level no longer can assume the rigid form of sculpture but, rather, must be a living self, a living corporeal entity characterized by a free movement that supersedes the free repose of the stele, displaying the force that flows through the limbs. This is the living work of art, praised as the highest corporeal representation of the people. But in order for this unity to become reflected, it needs once more to draw on the element of language, no longer caught up in the opacity of the oracle or the inwardness of the hymn but so that it achieves a unity on a higher level.

- C. This is the *spiritual* work of art, and Hegel traces a development from epic to tragedy and comedy, which gradually removes the gods from the stage until man finally encounters nothing but himself, and this, as we will see, is the brief and transitory moment of what Hegel calls “absolute art.” In the language of the epic, the spirit of different groups comes together in a kind of prestate community, for which *The Iliad* and the war against Troy offer the paradigm. Not yet attaining the form of the state and “abstract thought” (PS §727), it is a communality of individuals under a supreme command rather than under a supreme rule, and as such, it is a highly tenuous unity not



organized by legality that can be broken up by individual decisions (as in the case of Achilles wrath; *The Iliad*, in fact, sets out from the moment when the supreme command is challenged). On the level of representational form, the epic takes us back from the cult into language, which now gives us a complete world sung forth by an individual who disappears himself; it is not his self that is displaced but, rather, a connection of the world of the gods and the singer mediated through the heroes. The action represented splits the essence; it unleashes a discord that moves between the orders: gods and humans perform the same actions, and here their interaction already shows the redundant nature of the divine powers in a way that prefigures the comic dissolution: the actions of the gods merely duplicate those of the humans, and as such, they are nothing but a “farical superfluity” (PS §730) that initiates their process of dying, in which they will be replaced by humans. The gods, in a way that Hegel describes as already comical, forget their own nature and their exchange with humans becomes a game played without inner necessity.

The epic is centered around the hero, but he is himself split into extremes and does not partake in the life of the middle; these extremes must be united, which will be the task of tragedy as a “higher language” (PS §733). Here the dispersed moments are brought together; language appears in a purer form, in which the protagonists take the stage in order to express their inner essence; and the hero with his determinate character presents a further step of humanization. Here, too, there is a split, first between the choir of elders who themselves wield no power and instead express submission to fate and destiny, acceptance of the order of the world and the acting individuals that incarnate general powers and set the conflict in motion. The paradigm is *Antigone* in which the main protagonists embody the conflict between divine and human, family and state, unwritten and written law, and the beautiful totality of Greek ethical substance begins to crumble in a process that Hegel, as we have noted, had already treated in earlier sections on ethical life but that here reappears as a moment in the development of art-religion.

In the figure of Oedipus, the split appears in knowing itself. One side of the substance remains hidden, and the command of the oracle is devious: “He who had the power to unlock the riddle of the sphinx itself, trustingly, as with childlike confidence, is sent to ruin through what the god reveals to him” (PS §737). The opposition now lies between the certainty of the self and the objective essence; Oedipus grasps only one side and his action twists what is known into its opposite. The clear conscious assurance of certainty has its confirmation in forgetfulness, and action reveals the flaw in consciousness, for which the play provides a plethora of warning signs (some of which curiously, in fact, seem to be derived from Shakespeare):

The fury of the priestess, the inhuman shape of the witches, the voices of trees and birds, the dream, and so on, are not the ways in which truth appears; rather, they are warning signs of deception, of not being reflectively prudent, of the singularity and the contingency of knowing.

(PS §740)

Both sides are right and wrong, and reconciliation can only be had in death or oblivion.

The final step in “the depopulation of heaven” (PS §741) will be taken in comedy. Individuals now only recognize one power, Zeus as the power of the state, and the rest sinks down to the hero’s passions. The substance here, on one hand, appears as divided among the characters, and the divine powers retreat from the scenic space, but as this substance still remains separate, it is allotted to the choir or the spectators, who now experience fear or compassion:

The self-consciousness of the heroes must set aside its mask and show itself as knowing itself to be the fate of the gods of the chorus, as well as that of the absolute powers themselves, and as no longer separated from the chorus, from the universal consciousness.

(PS §743)

In comedy, this actual self-consciousness now becomes the fate of the gods, and the subject “expresses the irony of something that wants to be something for itself” (PS §744). The self is a real self with a mask that it uses to be not only a person through the act of *prosopopeia* but also an ordinary self, the actor or the spectator. The divine substance passes over into human consciousness, and in comedy, consciousness becomes aware of the irony in this; comedy shows the “laughable” (PS §745) split between individual and ethical substance. This movement is the consciousness of the dialectic that these maxims and laws have in themselves and thereby becomes the consciousness of the disappearance of the absolute validity with which they had previously appeared. The divine essentialities henceforth appear as clouds (as in Aristophanes’s play), a disappearing vapor, and dialectics turns into a deceptive tool delivered up to “pleasure and exuberance of the youth ... seduced by such knowing, and it puts weapons of deception into the hands of preoccupied and anxiety-ridden old age, itself restricted to the singularities of life,” so that they, in the end, turn into “game of opinionating and of the arbitrary choices of contingent individuality” (PS §746). The singular self absorbs the gods and becomes the sole actuality, and in this, art-religion has come to its completion. The actor’s self coincides with the character he plays, and the spectator is at home with what is represented to him;

all essentiality opposed to self-consciousness is brought back into its certainty of itself, in the “complete absence of fear,” it is a “healthy well-being as well as a consciousness permitting itself to be so, a well-being that outside of this comedy is not to be found” (PS §747).

If absolute art is the moment of artistic confidence, and the end of art as well as the first death of God in the narrative of the *Phenomenology*, this moment is also a moment of irony, a happiness that treats everything lightly but in this only affirms its own lack of substance. As Jean Hyppolite summarizes this figure in a way that already points ahead to Nietzsche, “man is the truth of the divine, but each time he reduces the divine to himself, each time that the movement whereby he transcends himself is lost, he loses himself.”<sup>26</sup>

The following section, “Revealed Religion,” looks back at this transformation from the opposite end, or more precisely from a vantage point *beyond the end* of classical art: as we noted, the elevation of the self in comedy is just as much a loss of spirit, and Hegel now describes the pain inherent in the “harsh phrase *that God has died*” (PS §752) as a transition. The death of the old gods thus becomes the precondition for the birth of the new God, which is a response to the pain of unhappy consciousness and the emptiness of a situation in which “the self is the absolute essence,” in the form of the descent of the absolute to man—which, in turn, prefigures the second death of God, this time a more profound death out of which philosophy itself will arise.

From the vantage point of Christianity, the oracles are gone and the statues have become corpses, faith has abandoned the hymns and the old artworks are “beautiful fruit broken off from the tree” (PS §753)—all of which can be understood as a nostalgic trope derived from Winckelmann, Schiller, and Hölderlin but, as we will see, also as that which makes possible our modern aesthetic appreciation of these works by wresting them away from their original soil. This is developed further in the Berlin lectures on aesthetics, and as Jean-Luc Nancy has suggested, we can see this idea germinating in the *Phenomenology* in the enigmatic image of the young girl,<sup>27</sup> who, in a gesture of mourning but also of generosity and grace, offers the works to us and our *Er-innerung*, to the interiorizing that takes place in our memory and our art-historical institutions. Nancy reads this passage as the advent of a discourse on art as an autonomous and self-conscious form, which requires the detachment from religion. Art, he notes, becomes art proper (as well as *arts* in the plural) when it is released from the task of presenting the divine,<sup>28</sup> and through the “inwardizing-recollecting (*Er-Innerung*) of the spirit” enters into the “*one* pantheon, into the self-conscious spirit conscious of itself as spirit.” (PS §753). The later claims in the Berlin lectures can be taken to explicate this, both in how they develop the pastness of art in terms of its place in the system and in how they point ahead to a

future of art that remains open and calls for a further development of a dialectical aesthetics.

### 12.3 Art as a “Thing of the Past” in the Berlin Lectures on Aesthetics

Hegel's lectures on aesthetics, which stem from the later parts of his development and are already located at a distance from the artist metaphysics of early Romanticism that the *Phenomenology* wants to displace, have been read as a strong and fundamental critique of the romantic conception, while they also presuppose its results and revaluations of the artwork and its essential relation to philosophy.<sup>29</sup> Against the claim that art would somehow surpass philosophical reason, Hegel's lectures situate art within the circular structure already determined in the philosophical encyclopedia. In the artwork we encounter “signs for the idea,”<sup>30</sup> a sensuous form of beauty in which the idea becomes palpable and visible, although still caught in the medium of externality. In this, the work becomes assigned to the position of an intermediary link between two extremes, as a bridge or a “middle” (*Mitte*), which not incidentally is the role generally ascribed to the faculty of imagination in idealist philosophy.

This is indeed also the case in Kant and Schelling but with the essential difference that Hegel's determination proceeds from the position of assuming to already know what “art” is supposed to mean on the basis of his conception of its *Aufhebung* in a philosophical understanding. In the later works, Hegel ascribes a defined structural *function* to art and inserts it as one of the moments in his philosophical encyclopedia, namely, as the first form within the third section of the philosophy of absolute spirit, which is a successor to the subjective spirit (anthropology, phenomenology, psychology) and objective spirit (right, *Moralität*, and *Sittlichkeit*). It is a link in the concatenation of circular forms through which the spirit comes back to itself, takes possession of itself, and sublates its own externality in a series of dialectical steps, and in this sense, it can be situated as a form of reconciliation between inner and outer, finite and infinite, and so on. It is precisely this reconciliatory function that allows art to be located within the same circle as religion and philosophy, that is, the highest and most ideal sphere of absolute spirit.

The circular form of Hegel's philosophy, in which the spirit “falls” or “externalizes” itself in nature in order to gradually return to itself, is well known and its general structure need not be explicated in this context, since our primary interest here is to understand the function of art within this schema. Spirit's externalization in nature produces a “break,” a fracture in reality, which has to be healed, and this is the structural task of art within the system: the spirit

[p]roduces out of itself the works of fine art as the first reconciliatory intermediary part between the merely external, sensuous, and

transitory, and pure thought, between nature and finite reality, and the infinite freedom of conceptual thought.<sup>31</sup>

Art is as such the first and sensuous way of reconciling spirit with itself, and in this respect, its destiny is to be superseded by other forms of the spirit's reflection in itself. The fact that art in this sense is always conceived from the point of view of its *end*, a final destination or essence, does not imply that it would not have its own necessity or be a merely contingent manifestation. Its necessity arises from the fact that the concept first has to *appear*, to *shine forth*, in a sensuous form of appearance, and the question will be to what extent this shining forth can take on new forms after the emergence of philosophy as absolute spirit.

The adequacy of the expression "sensuous shining of the idea" has recently been questioned, above all by Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert in her recent editions of the student's notes from Hegel's lectures. The expression, in fact, only occurs in Hotho's later reconstructed version of the lectures, whereas the *Nachschriften* speak of art as the "existence" (*Dasein*) or "life" (*Lebendigkeit*) of the idea. In Gethmann-Siefert's reading this implies a fundamental misunderstanding on Hotho's part, and the idea of sensuous shining, she claims, suggests a Platonic denigration of the sensible world and a corresponding rejection of art, which, however, seems far from Hegel's claims. "This determination," Gethmann-Siefert writes,

[h]as virtually nothing to do with the earlier reflections, and it appears as if Hegel here would have abandoned his original determination in favor of a depreciative understanding of art as mere sensuous appearance (which as mere 'deception' would have nothing to do with philosophy and true knowledge).<sup>32</sup>

This seems to me to somewhat overstate the case and to rest on a foreshortened understanding of *Schein* as *mere Schein*, *mere appearance*, which runs counter to Hegel's whole idea of a logic of essence. In the Hotho edition of the lectures, Hegel, in fact, continues: "*Shining* is however itself essential to *essence*, and the truth would not exist, if it did not shine forth, if it would not exist *for One*, *for itself* as well as *for spirit as such*" (Doch der Schein selbst ist dem Wesen wesentlich, die Wahrheit wäre nicht, wenn sie nicht schiene und erschiene, wenn sie nicht *für* Eines wäre, *für* sich selbst sowohl als auch *für* den Geist überhaupt).<sup>33</sup> It is undoubtedly true that the student's notes provide many corrections to Hotho's text, but as far as I can see, the overarching philosophical claims remain the same. Convincing arguments against the thesis that the "pastness" of art (which, as we have seen, is a possible reading of the section on the Art-Religion in *Phenomenology*, but neither exhausts the role played by singular artworks or the way in which art enters into the "Pantheon" of *Er-Innerung*) would imply its death or simple disappearance can be extracted from Hotho's text as well, which, of course, by

no means diminishes the interest of the *Nachschriften*, in many respects opening new avenues to the reading of Hegel.

Art makes it possible for the concept to shine forth, to exist, or to be alive—all of which can be understood as equivalent expressions—in an embodied form, and as such, it is the first and necessary form of appearing, even though it is, with respect to the absolute, predestined to be replaced by other modes of presentations, that is, religion and philosophy, whereby the form and the content of the presentation will become more and more adequate to each other. In this process, art will be displaced, first by *religion*, which allows the non-sensuous aspect of the concept to appear in its pure difference toward finite sensibility, and finally by *philosophy*, which presents the concept in its own medium, that is, thought. Art is posited as a necessary stage, and in one sense its essence consists in *having been* thought by philosophy its *telos* will only appear when its own existence has been retrieved into the form of a *representation* within the philosophical discourse on art, that is, aesthetics. In another sense, art remains, and philosophy in no way makes the existence of art unnecessary; in fact, philosophical thought is dependent on *having traversed* art, interiorized the sphere of aesthetic, and the truth of art (just as the truth of religion) remains *within* philosophy, even if only as one of its moments.

When Hegel in a famous statement, admittedly from the Hotho edition, epitomizes the whole of this logic, we must carefully note his exact words: "In all these relations art is and remains, with respect to its highest determination, for us a thing of the past" (In allen diesen Beziehungen ist und bleibt die Kunst nach der Seite ihrer höchsten Bestimmung für uns ein Vergangenes).<sup>34</sup> Hegel's statement has been commented in numerous ways, from Heidegger<sup>35</sup> to Adorno,<sup>36</sup> but what seems crucial here is the phrase "with respect to its highest determination," which points to art in relation to the task of adequately presenting the concept, a task that, for Hegel, at present must be done by science or philosophy. In the *Phenomenology*, this threshold on one reading seems to have been crossed already in antiquity; on another reading, artworks remain with us, first as ways of organizing the text of philosophy, not as something that it thinks about but thinks with, emancipated from their subservience to religion and entering into the sphere of the aesthetic, in which they have a free relation to philosophical discourse.

This argument was already sketched out by Dieter Henrich<sup>37</sup> and has been picked up today by, among others, Eva Geulen and Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert (even though she, as we have noted, sets up a sharp divide between the Hotho edition and the student notes). For Geulen, Hegel is not the last, backward-looking classist but, rather, "the first to theorize a modernity that is unthinkable without the museum, regardless of whether it is installed in it as a building, only fills it with new things, or revolts against it."<sup>38</sup> Geulen draws on Boris Groys, who gives a new twist to the link between art and religion in the *Phenomenology*: "The modern art museum" he writes, "is not a cemetery, but as it were

a church for objects. There, they undergo their conversion, their rebirth, their parousia.... Only such reborn things are what in modernity is called artworks.”<sup>39</sup>

In the Berlin lectures, art is still with us, although it is now placed in the sphere of aesthetics, which gives it a new momentum that we know would eventually come to push it out of the Hegelian orbit. Hegel thus provides us with an idea of an essential historicity of art, of its categories as being in continual progression, and we can undoubtedly read him—with him, against him—as being the first analyst of artistic modernity. Being a “thing of the past” in this sense means to carry the past with oneself, to respond to a tradition whose sense depends on the response given in and by the present.

## Notes

- 1 For a discussion of the context of Hegel’s early theological fragments and the development of *Sittlichkeit* and of how a reinterpreted Christianity became one of a series of different utopian modes projected back in history, see Christoph Jamme, “*Ein ungelehrtes Buch*”: *Die philosophische Gemeinschaft zwischen Hölderlin und Hegel in Frankfurt 1797–1800*, *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 23 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1983). On the ideas of Greece, see Jacques Taminiaux, *La nostalgie de la Grèce à l’aube de l’idéalisme allemand* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1967).
- 2 See, for instance, the passages in *Jenaer Systementwürfe*, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1976), p. 263.
- 3 See *Briefe von und an Hegel*, eds. Johannes Hoffmeister & Friedhelm Nicolin (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1981), vol. I, p. 24f. Hegel’s response to Hölderlin’s proposal is lost.
- 4 For a discussion of the tension between ancient and modern in Hölderlin’s work on *Empedokles*, which went through three successive versions and was finally abandoned in 1799, see Véronique M. Fôti, *Epochal Discordance: Hölderlin’s Philosophy of Tragedy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006).
- 5 See Christoph Jamme and Helmut Schneider (eds.), *Mythologie der Vernunft: Hegels ältestes Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), which contains a selection of important philological and philosophical interpretations of the text, by Franz Rosenzweig, Otto Pöggeler, Dieter Henrich, Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, and Xavier Tilliette.
- 6 The image of the state-machine, in fact, has Kantian roots; cf. for instance the paragraph “Beauty as a Symbol of Morality” in the *Critique of Judgment* (§59), in which Kant discusses two different ways of symbolizing the state: if it is controlled by “internal popular law,” it is represented by an “animated body,” if it is controlled by a “singular absolute will,” by a “mere machine.” Both of these cases are, however, “symbolic representations,” and this symbolism, in merely transferring a “rule for reflection” from one object to another, would be precisely what a text like the *Älteste Systemprogramm* attempts to transgress by posing the aesthetic idea as the highest.
- 7 “Finally, the idea that unites all [previous ones], the idea of beauty, the word understood in the higher Platonic sense. I am convinced now, that the highest act of reason, which—in that it comprises all ideas—is an aesthetic act, and that truth and goodness are united as sisters only in beauty. The philosopher must possess as much aesthetic capacity as the poet. The people without an aesthetic

sensibility are philosophical literalists [*Buchstabenphilosophen*]. Philosophy of the spirit is an aesthetic philosophy." *Das älteste Systemprogramm*, quoted from the transcription in *Mythologie der Vernunft*, p. 12f.

- 8 See his "Über Dante in philosophischer Beziehung" (1803), first published in the two-year collaborative project undertaken with Hegel in Jena, *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*. For Schelling, Dante creates a new individual unity that transcends the ancient epic form and provides the law of modern poetry, which he describes in terms of a "mythology": "The necessary law of modern poetry, all the way up to the point, still indeterminate and distant, where the great epos of modern times, hitherto only indicated only rhapsodically and partially, appears as a closed totality, is the following: that the individual should form to the world appearing to him into a unity, and out of the material of his time, its history and its science, create his own mythology." *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, ed. Steffen Dietzsch (Leipzig: Reclam, 1981), p. 414.
- 9 The conflict of the modern novel, in fact, lies "zwischen der Poesie des Herzens und der entgegenstehenden Prosa der Verhältnisse"; see *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, Werke*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer & Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), vol. 14, p. 219f., and vol. 15, p. 392f. Henceforth: *Werke*, volume, page.
- 10 "Die Ästhetik in Hegels System der Philosophie" (1931), rpr. in *Beiträge zum Verständnis und zur Kritik Hegels*, Hegel-Studien, 1965, Beiheft 2, pp. 425–442.
- 11 See Jean Starobinski, "Hamlet et Freud," preface in Ernest Jones, *Hamlet et Oedipe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).
- 12 This might have been a "ingenuous makeshift solution," as Walter Schulz suggests; see Schulz, *Die Vollendung des deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1975), p. 132. Others have seen this position, which Schelling a few years later would rework in the philosophy of identity, as extending all the way up to the late writings on the philosophy of mythology; see, for instance, Dieter Jähnig, *Schelling: Die Kunst in der Philosophie*, 2 vol. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1966–1969).
- 13 Hegel's interpretation has been taken up and pushed in many directions; for an overview, see George Steiner, *Antigones* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984). Contemporary examples include Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), and Cecilia Sjöholm, *The Antigone Complex: Ethics and the Invention of Feminine Desire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). See also Chapter 8 in this volume by Allen Speight.
- 14 All citations from the *Phenomenology* are taken from a translation by Terry Pinkard, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), with paragraph numbers.
- 15 As Günther Wohlfart notes, there is a similar emphasis on forms of language in the section on "Art-Religion," which can be taken as a series of different "linguistic representations of the concept." See Wohlfart, *Der Spekulative Satz: Bemerkungen zum Begriff der Spekulation bei Hegel* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), p. 168.
- 16 For a reading of the dash as a philosophical figure in Hegel, which introduces a pause, hesitation, and so on, at the opening of the *Logic*, see Rebecca Comay & Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018). For the readings of Hegel's citation of Schiller, see Boldyrev (Chapter 14, this volume).
- 17 Or rather, if we follow the architecture of the Hotho edition, in the first version of the ending that constitutes the conclusion to the section on the dissolution of the romantic art-form. In spite of the predilection for antiquity often ascribed to Hegel, he here in no way suggests a return to the ideals superseded



by history: “No Homer, Sophocles etc., no Dante, Ariosto or Shakespeare can appear in our time; what has been sung so magnificently, expressed so freely, has been expressed; these are subject matters, ways of intuiting and apprehending them, which have been sung to the end. Only the present is fresh, whereas other things fade away more and more” (*Werke* 14, 238). In the present, what appears as the source of art is man in his entirety, “*humanus*” as the “new holy one” (237), pointing toward an art for which (Hegel here alludes to Terence) “nothing more would be alien” (238). Hegel’s indications remain fairly vague—he cites Persian and Arabic art, Petrarca, and, above all, Goethe’s *West-östlicher Divan* as the possibility of a new encounter between East and West—but they clearly show that he did not perceive the dissolution of the romantic art form as the exhaustion of art as such.

- 18 See, for instance, *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik. Nach Hegel. Im Sommer 1826. Mitschrift Friedrich Carl Hermann Victor von Kehler, Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert & Bernadette Collenberg-Plotnikov* (eds.) (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2004), p. 73.
- 19 Walter Jaeschke, *Die Vernunft in der Religion: Studien zur Grundlegung der Religionsphilosophie Hegels* (Stuttgart: frommann-holzboog, p. 1986), p. 211ff.
- 20 Wolfgang Bonsiepen, “Altpersische Lichreligion und neupersische Poesie,” in Otto Pöggeler (ed.), *Hegel in Berlin*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Reichert, 1981).
- 21 See Derrida’s discussion of these passages in *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974), p. 331ff.; and Heidegger’s lecture on “Time and Being” and the following seminar transcript, in *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969). For a discussion of the importance of Derrida’s reading of the passage for his interpretation of Hegel as a whole, see Simon Critchley, “A Commentary Upon Derrida’s Reading of Hegel in *Glas*,” in Stuart Barnett (ed.), *Hegel After Derrida* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- 22 One of these junctures is the reading of *Antigone*. Here, Derrida suggests, Hegel’s reading of the play displays a “fascination with a figure that cannot be assimilated into the system,” a “vertiginous insistence on something that cannot be classified” and yet plays a “quasi-transcendental role” and lets “position” pass over into “ex-position,” all of which opens the movement of dialectics as well as limits it. See Derrida, “Glas,” pp. 211 and 227 (left column).
- 23 In the later lectures, Hegel would develop this much further and explicate the link between architecture as the first art of space, matter, and gravity, which inscribes death and the underworld in a movement toward the Greek luminosity. I discuss this in more detail in “Hegel and the Grounding of Architecture,” in Michael Asgaard and Henrik Oxvig (eds.), *The Paradoxes of Appearing: Essays on Art, Architecture, and Philosophy* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2009).
- 24 In the Berlin lectures, Hegel suggests that this lack is reflected in the empty eyes of the statues, in the absence of *glance*: “His glance is what is most full of soul, the concentration of his inmost personality and sentient subjectivity. We are at one with a man in a handshake, but still more quickly in his glance. And it is just this clearest expression of a man’s soul that sculpture must lack.” *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, Werke* 14, 389.
- 25 Architecture, Hegel will later suggest in the Berlin lectures, is necessarily bound up with *sculpture*, where the beauty of the divinity merges with the human form and the work becomes a self-sufficient presentation of the ideal, which for Hegel is the basic meaning of the “classical.” This advent of the classical, however, also implies that architecture must withdraw into a *ground* in a second and almost gestalt sense, as in the Greek temple that forms the backdrop to the figure of the free-standing sculpture, and in this way serves the subsequent art, which then through the logic of sublation can be taken as the “truth” of architecture, all of which indicates architecture’s position as the limit of the system of the fine arts.

- 26 Jean Hyppolite, *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel* (Paris: Aubier, 1946), p. 537.
- 27 Jean-Luc Nany suggest that this enigmatic character should be seen as one of the figures of Pompeii, which Hegel knew; see Jean-Luc Nancy, *Les muses* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), p. 91 and note 1, and Hegel's own comments in *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, *Werke* 15, 20.
- 28 Nancy, "Les muses", p. 79.
- 29 For instance, with reference to Schelling, Hegel claims that art here found its "scientific position," admittedly in a "skewed" way; see *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, *Werke* 13, 91f. In fact, Hegel, to my knowledge, would never return to these issues, but on the basis of this statement, it is quite easy to say what his argument against Schelling's views on art in the 1800 *System* would be: Schelling, in fact, makes a conceptual grasp of art impossible, since reflection always is posterior to the absolute act, and his model for philosophy is not conceptual but artistic; it is that of the irresponsible *genius* and not that of *dialectic* labor.
- 30 *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, *Werke* 10, § 556.
- 31 *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, *Werke* 13, 21.
- 32 Annemarie Gethmann-Siebert, *Einführung in Hegels Ästhetik* (Munich: Fink, 2005), p. 91. In her edition of the student notes from Hegel's lectures from 1826, she suggests that art in modernity can no longer found the state, as in the Greek *polis*, but should serve maturation; see the preface in Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst: Vorlesung von 1826* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), p. 15.
- 33 *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, *Werke* 13, 21.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 26f.
- 35 In the postface to *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, Heidegger notes that Hegel's thesis cannot be refuted by the emergence of new artistic movements since Hegel's time. But, he continues, the question remains: "Is art still an essential and necessary way in which decisive truth happens for our historical Dasein, or is this no longer the case?" Heidegger, *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe* vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), p. 68. For Heidegger, the truth of art hinges on the dismantling of aesthetics and "experience" as caught up in subjectivity, whereas Hegel would no doubt see modern art as a more profound exploration of subjectivity; see Heidegger's handwritten notes a and b, "Holzwege", p. 66.
- 36 Adorno grapples with Hegel's claim in many texts, notably *Ästhetische Theorie*, in which the argument often appears that Hegel declared art to be over because of his premature understanding of society as already reconciled with itself. Of particular interest is, however, the reading of Hegel as a threshold to modernism that was crossed at the same time by Beethoven and the undoing of classical form in the "late style"; see Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: Philosophie der Musik: Fragmente und Texte*, Rolf Tiedemann (ed.) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), and my discussion of this in "Adorno's Beethoven: Undoing Hegel From Within," *Problemi International* (Ljubljana: Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, 2021).
- 37 See Dieter Henrich, "Kunst und Kunstphilosophie der Gegenwart (Überlegungen mit Rücksicht auf Hegel)," in Wolfgang Iser (ed.) *Immanente Ästhetik: Ästhetische Reflexion* (Munich: Fink, 1966).
- 38 Eva Geulen, *Das Ende der Kunst. Lesarten eines Gerüchts nach Hegel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), p. 59.
- 39 Boris Groys, *Logik der Sammlung: Am Ende des musealen Zeitalters* (Munich: Hanser, 1997), p. 9.

# 13 Absolute Mapping

## Jameson's Variations on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Jamila M.H. Mascot

Faithful to its author's motto—"always historicize!"—Jameson's *Hegel Variations* (2010) proves a committed effort toward *historicizing* the *Phenomenology of Spirit* by bringing it back to its proper context while at the same time making its dialectical kernel meaningful for contemporary readership.<sup>1</sup> Such perspective enables Jameson to reject recurrent teleological twistings of Hegel's dialectic that would prove unappealing in the present and to eventually transcode Alexandre Kojève's legendary interpretation of Hegelian philosophy as the seal of the *end of history*—an end marked by the Spirit's self-realization at the peak of the phenomenological itinerary—for the purposes of our age.

Accordingly, Jameson's Hegel appears not merely as an "ideologist of modern" who, thanks to his sharp understanding of his own time, was able to grasp the social contradictions that the modern era would hand down to posterity, but also as a precursor (albeit not a prophet) of the postmodern condition we inhabit, characterized, in Jameson's view, by "cynical reason" and by a massive "plebeianization" of society—a concept to which we shall return later.<sup>2</sup>

Curiously enough, Jameson's approach to the *Phenomenology* is selective and, to that extent, *symptomatic*. The author deliberately focuses only on the first four chapters of Hegel's monumental work, considering "Spirit" as the concluding section of the book and dismissing both "Religion" and "Absolute Knowing" as perfunctory and redundant. In Jameson's reading, the latter constitute two nonnarrative supplements of the narrative plot of the *Phenomenology*, that culminates with the advent of the postrevolutionary society—a provisional stalemate in the advancement of history that coincides with "an immense dialectical confrontation between the modern subject and its humanized object world".<sup>3</sup>

Jameson thus considers both "Religion" and "Absolute Knowing" as semiautonomous dimensions of the social totality merely complementing the (already accomplished) consummation of the historical course that happened in Hegel's own time and is recounted in the pages of the Spirit chapter. According to Jameson, these two supplementary spheres are no more than "afterthoughts" that add nothing significant to what Hegel has developed so far.

What is even more striking is Jameson's attitude with regard to the very final chapter of the *Phenomenology*—"a most sketchy and disappointing anticlimactic conclusion for so intricate a work"—which barely receives a couple of pages at the end of the *Variations*.<sup>4</sup> Because of its allegedly redundant character, the Absolute—hardly a minor issue in the economy of the *Phenomenology* and of Hegel's philosophy *tout court*—is quickly dismissed with few critical remarks on the presumed "narcissism" of the speculative: a reproach Jameson deems more to the point than traditional accusations of "idealism" and "totalitarianism" often leveled at both the aims and the outcomes of Hegel's dialectic.

The present chapter employs Jameson's "minimalist" reading of the very last section of the phenomenological path as a speculative lever in order to discuss his overall hermeneutics of the *Phenomenology* as a suite of *variations without a theme*.<sup>5</sup> It thus questions Jameson's *sui generis* attempt to rescue the dialectic from the speculative and warns against the deflationary drifts of such attempts. Engaging with the task of reconciling the partisan of the *cartography of the Absolute* with his own reading of Hegel's Absolute, this chapter also suggests that Jameson paradoxically distances himself from the author of the *Phenomenology* where his critical theory is actually closer to Hegel's speculative ambitions.<sup>6</sup> Drawing on the commitment that both authors share to the task of *totalizing* and "seeing it whole",<sup>7</sup> that is, their vocation for the Absolute, the chapter proposes a rapprochement between Hegel's *Absolute Knowing* and Jameson's *cognitive mapping* under the banner of *absolute mapping*, with the aim to make room in Jameson's theoretical framework for the *valences* of Hegel's Absolute.<sup>8</sup>

After illustrating Jameson's key musical insights about the *Phenomenology* and its variations (Section 13.1), the chapter first follows his analysis of the chapter on Spirit through the lenses of Kojève's reading of Hegel (Section 13.2). Second, it will challenge Jameson's understanding of Hegel's Absolute as a purely narcissistic enterprise (Section 13.3). Finally, it argues for a critical match between Hegel's conception of "Absolute Knowing" and Jameson's plea for a "cartography of the absolute", both conceived as an effort to counter-totalize the social totality we live in.<sup>9</sup> The chapter thus proposes finding in Jameson's reactualization of the *discourse on totality*, a fruitful theoretical perspective to frame Hegel's understanding of "Absolute Knowing" as *absolute mapping* (Section 13.4).<sup>10</sup>

### 13.1 Oppositions and Variations

*The Hegel Variations* ventures to present an obstinate and polemic interpretation of Hegelian philosophy. One of the merits of such interpretation lies in avoiding the most detrimental pitfalls of Hegelianism, namely, the dangers of a rusty dialectic and a claustrophobic teleology directly leading to the end of history and philosophy.

Praising the suppleness of Hegel's dialectic and its proverbial unrest, Jameson valuably contributes to shuffling the coordinates of contemporary debates within Hegelian studies and to enthusiastically revive the vibrant hypothesis of rereading Hegel with Marx without the burden of all-too-easy dogmatic shortcuts.

However, one cannot but notice and question the theoretical consequences of this enthusiastic undertaking, whose main strategy consists in *playing* on the plot of the *Phenomenology* "the well-nigh infinite virtuosity of the variational process", a process that *resonates* with Jameson's understanding of the dialectic as the field of the open-ended.<sup>11</sup>

The musical notion of variation, which Jameson borrows from Adorno's writing on Schoenberg and projects onto Hegel's *Phenomenology*, functions as a conceptual catalyst for the reading of the various *Gestalten* unfolding through the phenomenological route.<sup>12</sup> Yet, for Jameson, Hegelian variations do not behave as *variations on the same theme*, rather as ceaseless reconfigurations of themes that happen to be staged in the shape of protean oppositions, to the point that the very notion of identity, as the core ground of each posited determination, vanishes into the perpetual shifting of volatile conceptual constellations.

Consciousness and its Object, Sense Certainty and Language, Self-consciousness and its Other, Lordship and Bondage, Faith and Enlightenment, French Revolution and Terror, hard-hearted, judgmental *Gewissen* and Forgiveness are some of the key pairs that punctuate the rhythm of the deployment of the *Geist*. In Jameson's view, those "textual moments", whilst avoiding the risk of any transhistorical reification thanks to their peculiar historico-phenomenological fabric, still maintain an undeniable interest for a meditation on the character of our present condition.<sup>13</sup> This is not to say they should not be read as contextual answers provided by Hegel to the contingent historical and philosophical challenges of his time—the dilemmas inherited from the post-Kantian debate and the problems disclosed by the emergence of the postrevolutionary society—but to suggest that such themes can be mobilized in the effort of making sense of our own time as well.

Since Hegel variations are to be conceived as repetitions, mutations, reiterations and returns allowing for the proliferation of differences, the question may arise as to whether the trope of the musical variation is meant to incarnate "something like the progressive intersections of a *single vector* with the loops of a spiral"<sup>14</sup>—the latter being the figure that for Jameson best epitomizes the dialectical structure of the *Phenomenology*—or to dismantle the very notion of origin *qua* identity with the aim to attain, in a strongly deconstructive fashion, a plurality of "copies without originals".<sup>15</sup>

If some sort of linear progression, both historical and speculative, is undoubtedly at play in the *Phenomenology*, Jameson's effort to "rescue [it] from its stereotypical reading as an out-of-date teleology" pushes him

to interpret its weave as a progressive rhythmical expansion of the dialectic that does not rely on a single and stable *Leitmotiv*.<sup>16</sup>

However, his stance remains somehow ambivalent: Does such a rhythmical expansion display a dialectical kernel that governs its movement, or does it merely consist of a series of variations without a thread, an *ars combinatoria* of unpredictable differences?

In reality, Jameson sympathizes with the pattern of “infinite scissiparity” pinpointed by Alain Badiou regarding Hegel’s logic, namely the pattern of the *One-dividing-into-Two* that by countering the centripetal inclination of the subject returning to itself and by preventing the dialectic from reaching its third and allegedly last reconciling stage, spares it from the trap of its final synthesis.<sup>17</sup> Thus, *scission* can be considered as the leading theme that varies through the different steps of the phenomenological ladder, creating unstable and changing configurations of opposite terms. For Jameson, what this theme reveals, borrowing from Adorno, is precisely its own nonidentical identity, by which “the thematic material is of such a nature that to attempt to secure it is tantamount to varying it”.<sup>18</sup> “Fidelity to the demands of the theme”, Adorno writes in his 1941 essay on “Schoenberg and Progress”, signifies a constantly intervening alteration in all its given moments”.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Adorno also suggests that “music achieves a completely new relationship to time within which a given work takes place”.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the *Phenomenology* establishes a peculiar temporal setting for its own unfolding, one that is at the same time ascendant (from the standpoint of consciousness) and circular (from the standpoint of Absolute Knowing). Neither figuration, the line or the circle, does however seem appropriate to Jameson, since in the last instance linearity and circularity end up reintroducing the traditional conception of Hegel’s philosophy either as a teleological narrative or as a self-enclosed system, whereas for him “it is preferable to grasp each moment [of the phenomenological progression] as an interminable play of oppositions”, insofar as “this will train us in the exercise of a non-teleological Hegel”.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the notion of variation appears as the most suitable conceptual tool to inject nonteleological temporality into the plot of the dialectic so that in a “truly postmodern fashion” the emphasis on differences over identities “ultimately comes to liquidate identity as such, in a well nigh suicidal melt-down in which [difference] must itself also disappear”.<sup>22</sup>

The dialectic of the *Phenomenology* thus unmasks the *arcane* of identity *qua* non-identity by pinpointing the contradictory (in)stability of words, categories and concepts, all impregnated with their magmatic historicity. This resonates with the failing inner nature of representation *tout court*, that stems from the inescapable gap existing between the speaker as an individual and the universality of language itself, a crucial trait revealed by Hegel at the very beginning of his *Phenomenology* through the experience of “Sense Certainty”, the first and most immediate form

of consciousness. This is why, for the author of the *Variations*, Hegel's dialectic proves its deep "kinship with deconstruction" by showing how language "sets an intention which it is constitutively incapable of keeping".<sup>23</sup> What Jameson characterizes as "a properly Hegelian deconstruction" is precisely the staged reiteration of language's inability to meet its own representational standards, something that for him constitutes a key thread of the *Phenomenology* and the drive of the variational process as "a ceaseless movement back and forth between antitheses".<sup>24</sup> In his view, variations also represent a quintessentially dialectical device insofar as they express Hegel's intensive understanding of the speculative against Kant's flat spatialization of metaphysical thought. If for the latter the limits of reason designate the boundaries beyond which lie the Things-in-themselves, for Hegel, the limit between something and its other is nothing but their relation that breaks the law of noncontradiction and allows for the constant shift of the opposites, that is, precisely for their variations.

Variations also disband the possibility of conceiving of any speculative climax as a unity of opposites, as a synthesis, valuing instead the substantial relationality and processuality of a dialectic "without positive terms".<sup>25</sup> The typical Hegelian *Setzen*, the positing of presuppositions, is thus transcoded into a permanent reshuffling of "oppositions without any stable resting place".<sup>26</sup>

This is both the result of Jameson's deconstructive attitude with regard to the *Phenomenology*—what he dubs his "rather structural reading ... of the *Phenomenology*"<sup>27</sup>—and of the slightly Leninian vein in which he emphasizes the need for playing the energy of the dialectic against the heavy rigidity of the system and the subsequent systematizations of Hegel's philosophy that have been pursued by various branches of Hegelianism.<sup>28</sup>

The danger of such hermeneutic choice lies in a possible undermining of the speculative nature of the Absolute in the name of a dialectic of differences or, as has been remarked, in replacing Hegel's alleged "teleology of the speculative" with a "paradoxical teleology of difference".<sup>29</sup> *Contra* Jameson, it can be argued that variations *qua* fragmented determinate moments acquire their proper significance only within a consistent appraisal of Hegel's claim for totality, embodied by the speculative as such, namely, by Absolute Knowing. It is precisely the speculative, considered by Jameson both metaphysical and dogmatic, that cannot be easily dismissed and needs to be accounted for if one is to avoid the risk of liquidating the very core of Hegelian thinking.

In fact, the alternative is not between an Absolute of differences with no identity and an Absolute identity conceived as the final synthesis of all differences. What is at stake in the speculative is rather the consubstantial belonging and codependence of the dialectical terms that compose a vertiginous series of oppositions, where the difference between the terms is

accountable for the reciprocal staging of identity, an identity that is, however, never fixed in advance as an origin. In other words, the *rationality* of the concept and its freedom lie precisely in its necessary relationality.

As has been noted, however, “to retain the moment of non-identity, presumably destroyed by the speculative, Jameson severs the relation of dialectics with speculation”, which is tantamount to abstracting the dialectics from Hegel’s system.<sup>30</sup> Yet, to oppose the system to the dialectic, to separate the *mystical shell* from the *rational kernel* is not really an option in Hegel’s terms.<sup>31</sup> While Jameson is actually choosing a hypertrophic dialectic against the danger of a reified metaphysics, Hegel would definitely argue that *tertium datur*, and such a third option is precisely the speculative.

### 13.2 Jameson, Kojève and the Postmodern Spirit

As one of “the centers of gravity of Hegel’s philosophical thinking”, ethical life lies at the core of Jameson’s untimely reading of the *Phenomenology*.<sup>32</sup> For this reason, he particularly values the “sociological” sections of the book, first and foremost those composing the chapter on Spirit, as opposed to the first three “technical-philosophical chapters” on Consciousness, Self-Consciousness and Reason.<sup>33</sup> The very conclusion of the section on “Self-alienated Spirit”—

the French Revolution and the Terror, to which I see the following chapter on Kantian morality in synchrony as a *pendant* and which will for us be read not as Kojève’s end of history, so much as the suspended step of a present as much ours as Hegel’s

—marks for Jameson, as recalled earlier, the very last words of the *Phenomenology*.<sup>34</sup>

Envisioning the *Geist* as a “collective reality”—with no emphasis on the spiritual dimension of such a collectivity—for which language represents “a symbolic apprenticeship”,<sup>35</sup> Jameson believes the Hegelian Spirit to incarnate a unity that perfectly displays Badiou’s pattern of the *One-dividing-into-Two*. Scission as its defining mark, therefore, is not to be blamed for tearing society apart: it is, on the contrary, what constitutes society as such. Dual differentiation thus appears as “the generating theme of the Spirit”, and changes in the reiteration of oppositions are to be seen as a consequence of the “mortality of social forms” of which Hegel is well aware.<sup>36</sup>

Jameson is fascinated by Hegel’s construing of the universal as a collectivity emerging as the outcome of everybody’s activity—*das Tun Aller und Jeder*. Not only against the “stereotype of the individual *vs* society” but also implicitly against Adorno’s critique of Hegel’s alleged lack of sympathy for the utopia of the particular overwhelmed by the weight



of the universal,<sup>37</sup> Jameson highly praises Hegel's consideration of "the universality of what is truly individual through the notion of 'actualization'".<sup>38</sup> Crucially, such notion displays the process whereby what is one's own happens to be inevitably transcoded into the element of universality, becoming precisely "the affair of everyone".<sup>39</sup>

In fact, Jameson interprets Hegelian *ethic* both as a philosophy of labor *qua* production of the material world of objects and as praxis, namely, as "the actualization of rational self-consciousness through its own activity" in the fabric of universality.<sup>40</sup> Both instances—labor and praxis—are grounded in the dialectic of "Lordship and Bondage", the famous trope of the master-and-slave dialectic that Jameson inherits from Kojève and interprets as "the first of Hegel's great celebrations of work".<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, two key Kojévian themes are revisited by Jameson as infra-structural grounds of the *Phenomenology* and leading threads of Hegel's variations. One is precisely the master-and-slave dialectic, and the other is the equally well-known thesis of the end of history. In both cases, Jameson's reading consists in playing Hegel's text against the reading of his French interpreter in order to overcome the constraints of Kojève's perspective.

While Kojève, by means of the master-and-slave dialectics, turns labor into the milestone of mankind "that persists throughout the rest of history and subtends Hegel's more explicit historical references much as a musical ground bass might continue on through all kinds of new thematic events in the score", Jameson reads the antagonistic pair as one figuration among others of the dialectical matrix of that "infinite scissiparity", considered crucial to Hegel's constitution of the social.<sup>42</sup> Jameson thus emphasizes dialectical restlessness and divisiveness as the quintessential registers of the Hegelian *Geist*. To that extent, not only must subjectivity always divide and double in order to become concrete and actualize itself, but the collective also needs to split in order to be One. Such dialectic behaves for Jameson as "an accord that sinks into the harmonic ground at various moments" of the phenomenological melody constantly resurfacing through the unfolding of the plot to undermine each unilateral affirmation of the One—as in the cases of the emergence of revolutionary Terror or the Kantian imperative—and to prove that all attempts at totalization on the side of an abstract particular fail as such to attain the shape of universality.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, Jameson considers Kojève's understanding of recognition—*qua* the desire of a human consciousness addressed to another desire—as insufficient and finds instead in the *Phenomenology* fruitful clues to envision the relocation of the *Anerkennung* into the broader horizon of the modern *Sittlichkeit* that involves the former slave once become ethical citizen.<sup>44</sup> This restaging of recognition takes place through the interaction of the subject with objectivity. The sequence on guilt, confession and forgiveness by which Hegel concludes the chapter on Spirit

thus sketches a new pattern of recognition whereby the subject shows its commitment to “the object world and its social institutions”.<sup>45</sup> From this perspective, confession “seals the acknowledgement of my own responsibility for the very construction and production of the social in the first place”.<sup>46</sup> In that sense, Jameson can argue that Hegel’s original proposal for a post-Kantian ethics consists in shifting emphasis from mere “obedience to the law and the state” to a deeper engagement with the social totality resulting from the individual’s responsibility regarding “the very production of these collective institutions”.<sup>47</sup> Both labor and praxis are accountable for rooting the subject into “the object world of utility” and the social world that he recognizes at once as its other and as the product of its own activity.<sup>48</sup> So conceived, recognition foreshadows a path for disalienation, disclosing the possibility for the subject to reappropriate an alien world of objects and institutions which is nothing but the outcome of human labor and human praxis.

Hegel’s broader conception of recognition—well beyond Kojève’s limited understanding of the master and slave dialectic—provides a key insight to understanding the sorcery of capitalist society where, in Jameson’s words, “the subject can find itself completely objectified and yet most completely itself”.<sup>49</sup> In this respect, as mentioned earlier, at the end of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel delivers a sharp diagnosis of its historical present as “an immense dialectical confrontation between the modern subject and its humanized object world”.<sup>50</sup> In Jameson’s view, a similar picture must be inscribed within Hegel’s expansive conception of history as a spiral of intensive “subsequent enlargements” of its spatial dimensions, from the polis to the Roman Empire to the age of imperialism and globalization.<sup>51</sup>

History is actually at the very heart of the second Kojévian theme that Jameson devotes much effort at digging into: the well-known thesis of the *fin de l’histoire*. According to Jameson, Kojève provides a twofold understanding of the end of history that, on one hand, describes a worldwide process culminating in the emergence of the “universal and homogeneous state” in which the master-and-slave dialectic sinks once and for all, thus inaugurating the advent of a classless society and, on the other hand, revolves around the personification of the end of history with the appearance of the Wise Man.

While dismissing the latter option, Jameson delves into the former in order to explore Kojève’s stance relative to the emergence of a “mass cultural mentality” over the older class divide, such a mentality characterizing our postmodern time, marked as it is by the end of ideologies and revolutionary claims.<sup>52</sup> Through Hegel and via Kojève, Jameson reads postmodernity as an era of cultural “plebeianization” that does not amount to political democratization, let alone social egalitarianism.

According to Jameson, Kojève grasps a salient element of Hegel’s conception of Spirit, namely the process of permanent dual differentiation, epitomized *entre autres* by the master-and-slave dialectic. This also

explains why the end of history coincides for Kojève with the disappearance of all antagonisms and divisions, an outcome resulting from the accomplishment of postrevolutionary modern freedom. In other words, Kojève's universal and homogeneous state eliminates the master-and-slave dualism insofar as all its citizens, both at once warriors and laborers, attain full satisfaction as such.

This is where Jameson finds Kojève's interpretation of the end of history particularly relevant: like Jameson and like Hegel, Kojève has the merit to historicize the achievement of the French Revolution and the advent of a postrevolutionary society in which masters and slaves no longer exist.<sup>53</sup> For Jameson, a generalized "plebeian class-consciousness" is what replaces the older aristocratic "ancien régime". Imparting an economic twist to Hegel's "essentially political" dialectic, Jameson deems the end of history "bourgeois" and stresses the class dimension of what may otherwise appear as a merely classless social totality.<sup>54</sup>

In this respect, in Jameson's view, Hegel's end of history does not constitute a "historical final moment" but rather a "provisional halt which corresponds to Hegel's own historical present", synthesizing the achievements of the Revolutionary age.<sup>55</sup> Yet, for Jameson, Hegel's world also resonates with our late 20th-century postmodern society, a context dominated by the bourgeois values of democratic freedom and universal satisfaction that nevertheless keeps a large part of mankind under the yoke of destitution and exploitation while at the same time removing from sight the principle of class struggle.

The expansion of Hegel's outlook from a merely Eurocentric perspective to a global one is not foreshadowed in his thought; it is, however, made thinkable, as Jameson suggests, by the very unfolding of the phenomenological dialectic once it is supplemented with "the hindsight of Marx's dialectic in *Capital*", that interprets the progressive development of capitalism as a spiral-shaped intensification gaining increasing spatial territory on which to exert its rule. In that specific sense, Hegel becomes a precursor of postmodernity whose thought did succeed in deciphering the unlimited expansive drive of bourgeois society through its abstract forms, rules and institutions.

If Hegel's end of history does not coincide with the end of the world, the end of the chapter on Spirit marks indeed for Jameson, as recalled earlier, the end of the *Phenomenology*, the subsequent chapters on Religion and Absolute Knowing being considered as mere perfunctory appendices.

Yet, if by dismissing the value of the two final chapters in the *Phenomenology* Jameson misconstrues Hegel's oeuvre, he is right in acknowledging the *coupure* that intervenes at this stage of the book with the conclusion of the section on Spirit, a change that Hegel himself highlights. The section on Religion clearly marks a shift in the narrative perspective, since it is from the standpoint of the Absolute that the story is recounted from this point on: the subject thinking the Absolute is finally replaced by the Absolute thinking itself.

### 13.3 Who's Afraid of Absolute Knowing?

Reading *The Hegel Variations*, one cannot but stumble on the lack of attention that Jameson devotes to investigating the nature of Hegel's Absolute and the role performed by "Absolute Knowing" in the context of the *Phenomenology*. Such deliberate dismissal of the conclusive chapter of the book deserves further exploration.

Jameson provides a mostly negative account of what he names "Absolute Spirit", pointing out precisely what should not be confused with it and exhorting the reader not to think of Absolute Spirit as a "method" or a "moment—whether historical or structural"—so as to avoid falling back into a teleological account of the *Phenomenology*.<sup>56</sup> He also cautions against reading the *Phenomenology* as a "prophecy" so as to rescue Hegel's work from any developmental interpretation that in many ways would totally disqualify the very possibility of speaking about Hegel today.<sup>57</sup> Following his inclination to transcode Hegel's philosophy for postmodern times, the author rather suggests we interpret Absolute Spirit through Marxian lenses as the manifestation of a "general intellect", a "historically new kind of general literacy",<sup>58</sup> namely, a sort of general mass consciousness of the new social transformations that occurred in the post-1789 era and replaced the ancient feudal mentality with a properly bourgeois collective spirit—the latter in turn translating into the plebeianization of society.

Yet, aside from this partial attempt to make positive sense of Hegel's Absolute, Jameson's effort is mostly aimed at engaging with its alleged *narcissism*. Rejecting the traditional charges of idealism and totalitarianism for which Hegelian philosophy has often been blamed, Jameson focuses on the narcissistic drift that, in his view, affects Hegel's ideal of the speculative.

"Narcissism", he writes,

[s]eems to me a better way of identifying what may sometimes be felt to be repulsive in the Hegelian system as such. ... the most serious drawback to the Hegelian system seems to me rather the way in which it conceives of speculative thinking as the "consummation of itself...Never truly to encounter the not-I, to come face-to-face with radical otherness: such is the dilemma of the Hegelian dialectic, which contemporary philosophies of difference and otherness seem only able to confront with mystical evocations and imperatives".<sup>59</sup>

Here, Jameson's argument echoes Adorno's famous criticism of the insensitivity of Hegel's speculation regarding its "recalcitrant others", namely, the experience of contingency and singularity<sup>60</sup>—the "indissolubility of an empirical, nonidentical moment" in Adorno's words—that seems to

resist and eventually escape the grip of the *Begriff*.<sup>61</sup> From there, Adorno conceives the task of the *Negative Dialectics*, aimed at rescuing all that is held as *negligible* by the speculative itself.<sup>62</sup> In his meditations on Hegelian dialectic, Adorno rightly grasps the underlying tensions haunting the very foundations of Hegel's system and resulting from philosophy's (in)ability to relate to its own limits and otherness. Nevertheless, by emphasizing the coercive power of the concept over the nonconceptual, Adorno overlooks the multifaceted *valences* of the Absolute and, in particular, the Absolute's capacity to sacrifice and free itself *in* its others, precisely in the name of its own absoluteness and power. As has been remarked, for the Absolute, to be free and liberated from restraints amounts to actually being "liberal" and freeing its others. To that extent, *contra* Jameson, the peak of the *Phenomenology*, namely the chapter on "Absolute Knowing", displays a function that is anything but perfunctory. It is indeed only at this stage that the very nature of the Absolute is fully revealed through the climax of its ascent that brings it to sink back again into the night of consciousness and to expand anew in the exteriority of space-time.

The Absolute's short circuit occurring at the end of the *Phenomenology* allows for a new beginning of the story, which does not, however, coincide with an eternal comeback of the same, since the achievement of Absolute Knowing marks a philosophical accomplishment that is both speculatively and historically irreversible. Therefore, it is only from the standpoint of such a speculative gain that Hegel conceives the emergence of a *Wiederanfang* through a sacrificial gesture that crucially invokes the negative limits (*Grenzen*) of the Absolute itself.

Absolute Knowing, as Hegel explains, only knows itself by reaching and knowing its own limits, by touching "the margins of philosophy".<sup>63</sup> In that sense, the Absolute, in fact, does not preserve itself from otherness: rather, it only exists by encountering its others. In order to do so, it must release (*entlassen*) itself from its conceptual form so as to take on new historical shapes. Such a painful experience, amounting to the perpetual sacrifice of the Absolute, discloses the advent of contingency in nature and in the life of Spirit and allows the Concept to meet with History and its ever-changing variables. For Hegel, such sacrifice is not merely an attitude of resigned passivity but requires on the side of the Absolute an active speculative recollection (*Erinnerung*) of the multiplicity of the existing, aimed at making sense of the latter without eliminating its irreducible inconceivability. Enabling a renewed beginning of the phenomenological path, the final *Entlassung* of the Absolute thus incarnates an act of liberation and testifies to "the supreme freedom and assurance of its self-knowledge", grounded in the Absolute's ability to reach and *tarry* with its others, something that the Spirit's permanent drive to *Entäusserung* incisively epitomizes.<sup>64</sup>

*Pace* Jameson, narcissism remains one of the major enemies of Hegel's speculation, as proved both by the *Phenomenology*'s merciless

portrait of the *beautiful soul* and the philosopher's proverbial dismissal of Romantic irony.<sup>65</sup> Along the same lines, Hegel's critique of abstract *Selbstständigkeit* and subjective *Eigensinn* leads him to reimagine the genesis of the subject through the prism of relationality and to stage *liminarity* as the backbone of the Absolute, an all-encompassing totality which remains nevertheless vulnerable to its own limits and boundaries.

Yet, in spite of the sense of abandonment deriving from the *Entlassen* of the Absolute, this should not lead us to embrace all-too-easy deflationary interpretations of Hegel's speculative.<sup>66</sup> That would amount to completely overlooking its "dense" ontological and epistemological claim, namely, the claim for both infinity and consummation.

### 13.4 Mapping the Absolute

Focusing on "[t]he need to stress an open-ended Hegel rather than the conventionally closed system which is projected by so many idle worries about Absolute Spirit, about totality or about Hegel's allegedly teleological philosophy of history", Jameson seems to leave unnoticed the many points of tangency that plead for a rapprochement of Hegel's conception of the Absolute to his own.<sup>67</sup> An insight key to pursuing this path can be found in Jameson's 1988 fortunate essay "Cognitive Mapping". In the wake of his analysis of the changes and contradictions brought about by the advent of late capitalism and its postmodern cultural logic, Jameson argues for a revival and reactualization of the concept of totality, which still awaits rescue from long-standing stigmatization—one can think of Jean-François Lyotard's well-known exhortation to "waging a war on totality" among others<sup>68</sup>—leading to Jameson's call for philosophers to repudiate the "direct line [that] runs from Hegel's Absolute Spirit to Stalin's Gulag".<sup>69</sup>

In its cautious and progressive rehabilitation of the notion, Jameson wonders why "'concepts of totality' have seemed necessary and unavoidable at certain historical moments and on the contrary noxious and unthinkable at others" and claims the speculative need for contemporary critical theory to engage again with the paradigm of totality.<sup>70</sup> Premised on its heuristic and political potential, Jameson's praise of totality relies on two major assumptions. The first draws on Kevin Lynch's spatial analysis of "the image of the city" (1960) as an absent totality,<sup>71</sup> projecting it onto the realm of social structure to pinpoint "the totality of class relations on a global (or should I say multinational) scale" that encounters a major impediment in the failure of representation to grasp it as a whole.<sup>72</sup> The second and related assumption actually amounts to launching an alert and displays Jameson's political concerns as he highlights the extent to which "the incapacity to map socially is as crippling to political experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for urban experience".<sup>73</sup> Provocatively, Jameson asks—echoing architect Aldo van Eyck—"But if society has no form how can architects build its

counterform?” and concludes that “without a conception of the social totality (and the possibility of transforming a whole social system), no properly socialist politics is possible”.<sup>74</sup>

Jameson also points out that “our dissatisfaction with the concept of totality is not a thought in its own right but rather a significant, a symptom, a function of the increasing difficulties in thinking of such a set of interrelationships in a complicated society”.<sup>75</sup> Borrowing from Althusser’s understanding of ideology as “the Imaginary representation of the subject’s relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence”, Jameson denounces a problem of representation (or a problem of “cognitive mapping” in his own words) that results in social disorientation and (im)political passivity.<sup>76</sup> So how to totalize the global society we live in, in an age widely affected by spatial discontinuities and deep social divides generated by the increasing expansion of capitalism that blocks the very experience of the world as a whole? How, in other words, to unify what capital in its totalizing capacity divides to conquer?

Jameson’s answer, namely, *cognitive mapping*, is both more and less than a factual solution to the dangerous social and political threat posed by the current mode of production. It is actually the diagnosis of an irredeemable *décalage* occurring between our lived experience of the world and its truth, whose origin has to be found in the processes of capitalist (re)production. “The truth of that limited daily experience of London lies”, Jameson writes,

[r]ather in India or Jamaica or Hong Kong; it is bound up with the whole colonial system of the British Empire that determines the very quality of the individual’s subjective life. Yet those structural coordinates are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people.<sup>77</sup>

Mapping the global social totality as a way to reestablish mediations between the aesthetic and the economic then becomes a theoretical imperative rich in political consequences, such as the possibility to restore connections, foster solidarity and cultivate the ability to unite and commit together across dividing and disorienting perceptions of the world. Yet the problem may be precisely how to reach and map what can’t be seen, namely, the totality as such: if phenomenological experience is not reliable for the task—it is precisely its impossibility relative to “seeing it whole” that creates the impasse—what kind of cognitive resources can be mobilized for the purpose of drafting new *cartographies of the Absolute*?<sup>78</sup>

This is where it seems that Hegel’s Absolute Knowing meets Jameson’s critical efforts. Undoubtedly, Hegel’s concerns on this matter sound very far away from Jameson’s declared socialist goals, and the comparison may therefore appear as far-fetched as historically ungrounded: Hegel is

writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Jameson right before the fall of the Berlin Wall, across a time-lapse of almost 200 years. One can, however, note that both authors engage with the task of restaging the totality from what might be seen as shared, similar premises. Hegel's and Jameson's assessments of the evils of their respective ages indeed resonate with each other: Hegel speaks of the *Entzweiung* as the fate of modernity, a tragic fate that has fissured and shattered the "beautiful totality" of the ancients and imposed itself as the natural law of the new times; Jameson sees postmodernity as dominated by spatial gaps and social splits that inevitably threaten the possibility of any encompassing appraisal of the world as a whole.

For Hegel, on one hand, the culture of *Entzweiung* is accountable for all the constitutive contradictions that permeate the modern era and result in the major philosophical inconsistencies underlying the *Reflexionsphilosophien* of his contemporaries—first and foremost the unacceptable misconception of the Absolute as that which cannot be grasped and remains beyond reach.<sup>79</sup>

For Jameson, on the other hand, the postmodern condition discloses entirely new cognitive coordinates, namely,

[a] situation in which we can say that if individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive model of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience. In both there is a sense of loss and excess.<sup>80</sup>

In Jameson's view, on an epistemological scale, the notion of totality helps discard the sustainability of inappropriate and incomplete modes of knowledge—taxonomic thoughts, perceptions and categories—*qua* partial representations that can be "true" *per se* without being consistent. The notion of totality thus designates the absent reality that phenomenological perceptions and individual thinking cannot apprehend; however, to encompass such absent reality remains the proper aim of critical theory.

Abstract and immediate representations of the world are not wrong in themselves, neither for Jameson nor for Hegel. Yet the Absolute must be staged against them if we are not to forget that they exist only as parts of a broader, meaningful whole from where they derive all their significance. Both Hegel and Jameson, in their own respective registers, tackle and question the relationship between science and representation, knowledge and experience by arguing that no immediate correspondence can be presupposed between any two of these domains. At the same time, both claim the necessity to establish connections for bridging those distinct spheres of human cognition that cannot simply be kept separate from each other. Finally, both intellectuals believe that culture as *Bildung* plays a crucial role in shaping the subject's experience of the world.



Jameson's plea for totality results in a manifest claim for a Marxist critique of capitalist society that pushes for a politicization and subsequent denaturalization of the economic by invoking a strong notion of the social whole. To this end, any counterhegemonic radical politics cannot but ground itself in the attempt to grasp such an incommensurable total entity.

Hegel, on the other hand, can in no way be interpreted as an *antelitteram* Marxist. Nevertheless, his commitment to the Absolute resonates with Jameson's concern with the totality, insofar as Hegel conceives the Absolute not as a purely theoretical matter but, rather, as an issue that has fundamental practical implications for ethics and politics, for aesthetics and religion. Indeed, for Hegel, none of these different spiritual domains can properly attain any sort of actualization without being rooted in the ground of the totality, that is, the Absolute "which is already present" (*es ist schon vorhanden*), as he eventually writes, and still must be constructed in thoughts.<sup>81</sup>

In this respect, Hegel's philosophy envisions the Absolute as a speculative work to be accomplished rather than a metaphysical substance to be discovered. The Absolute appears to him as an exit strategy from the representational conundrum to which modernity has delivered the subject. To that extent, Hegel's Absolute functions as an antidote to what Marx termed the "real abstractions" that contradictorily rule and organize the concrete experience of the modern world through the atomization of society. If, being an actual part of the modern life of Spirit, such abstractions cannot be fully reconciled in practice, they nonetheless require to be grasped philosophically at the level of their interconnected complexity. Similarly, Jameson's critical theory sees cognitive mapping as a profound instance emerging from the postmodern condition and expressing the need for "grasping our new being in the world". In other words, cognitive mapping is the only possible strategy to reconnect the figures and narratives shaping the postmodern experience of everyday reality to their "deeper non visual systemic cause".<sup>82</sup> In a strong Hegelian fashion, Jameson names this "the self-consciousness of the social totality".<sup>83</sup>

One cannot but remark the extent to which the two authors' vocation to "see[ing] it whole" translates into quite radically different projects: on one hand, Hegel's encyclopedic system and its attempt at reconstructing the Spirit's trajectory through a *Weltgeschichte* strongly inflected by a teleological temporality and hierarchical Eurocentrism; on the other hand, Jameson's effort to elaborate a "cartography of the Absolute" for mapping the world-system's spatial interconnections without falling into the trap of teleological projections.

For both Hegel and Jameson, the Absolute—or the totality—is the fundamental conceptual prism through which to think of the disruptive transformations their respective ages are undergoing: the postrevolutionary consecration of European nation-states as centralizing structures

meant to contain the antagonisms of modern bourgeois society, and the 20th-century subsumption of nation-states into the global spiral of the world economy.

The theoretical gap between Hegel's all-too-modern Absolute and Jameson's postmodern totality can be interpreted as reflecting the wide shift occurring in the transition from 18th- and 19th-century capitalism to 20th-century late capitalism. However, the abstract and concealing nature of the capitalist machine and its power relations as an all-encompassing, albeit untotizable, totality lay the foundations for Hegel's speculative edifice as much as for Jameson's drive toward cognitive mapping.

Regarding Jameson, it has been stated that

[t]o propose an aesthetic of cognitive mapping under conditions of late capitalism could be taken as an attempt to force into being a certain kind of political visibility and thus to counter the objective material effects of a dominant regime of representation.<sup>84</sup>

In turn, it can also be argued that Hegel's speculative effort at *absolute mapping* is similarly "embedded in an argument about historical change and the correlation between culture and political economy".<sup>85</sup> Facing the advent of modernity and the birth of a new historical form, such as "civil society", that structures and shapes the social totality by means of its manifold abstractions—labor and market, rights and laws—Hegel responds by waging a speculative battle against the culture of *Entzweiung* that dominates the philosophical landscape of the time and is implicated in the consolidation of divisions and antagonisms. Hence, his urge to theoretically restore the Absolute as the principle that allows for a comprehension of the world up to the intricate and contradictory entanglements of modernity.

If Jameson does not acknowledge the proximity of his intents with those of Hegel and interprets the latter's Absolute as the outcome of a merely narcissistic metaphysics, it is mostly because he does not recognize any proximity between the two stages of capitalism that characterize his and Hegel's age. The clash of representation is for Jameson a peculiar postmodern puzzle resulting from the spatial and social disjunctions triggered by the emergence of a global/colonial world economy that stops subjects "grasp[ing] the way the system functions as a whole".<sup>86</sup> In his view, the classical age of market capitalism, with its allegedly plain and visible social forms—such as the city, the nation and the class divide—that do not hide their truth behind themselves, does not experience the unsettling crisis of its modes of cultural representation as, in fact, post-modernity does. At that time, Jameson maintains, the social totality can still be grasped—that is, scientifically known, politically determined and eventually portrayed through realist and naturalist aesthetics. It is only later, with the establishment of monopoly capitalism in the age of imperialism, that representing the totality becomes an impossible—if

compelling—cognitive challenge in the face of an incommensurable social and geographical complexity. In that sense, for Jameson, the postmodern world is heir to such a cognitive failure and destined to meet increasing representational disparities and inconsistencies.

From such perspective, Hegel's philosophy can be interpreted as the non-troubling metaphysical expression of the existing totality rather than the dedicated speculative effort to attain Absolute Knowing as the only standpoint from which the whole can be conceived across its deep and wide historical unfolding, its divisions and contradictions. Additionally, the spatial penchant of Jameson's critique, aimed at outlining maps and cartographies of the social totality, seems to be antipodal to Hegel's inclination for recollecting the temporal texture of the many events occurring through the life of Spirit.

Jameson thus remains manifestly ambivalent regarding his assessment of Hegel's philosophy as "its own time comprehended in thoughts".<sup>87</sup> On one hand, he registers the profound distance between Hegel's modern world and his—as much as our—postmodern society. On the other hand, he argues in *The Hegel Variations* that such a world is still in many ways ours—still a capitalist world—and that Hegel's speculation has the merit to point out the divisive functioning of the capitalist totality—the *One-dividing-into-Two* that conceals itself through the fragmented multiplicity of its appearances.

One does not necessarily need to find the lowest common denominator between Jameson and Hegel's claims for the Absolute in order to produce a synthesis between them. Rather, what can be acknowledged is that a striving for "absolute mapping" was already present in Hegel's conception of Absolute Knowing as a quintessential speculative move to counter the representational troubles and disorienting abstractions caused by the advent of capitalist modernity.

## Notes

- 1 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. IX.
- 2 Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations. On the Phenomenology of Spirit* (London/New York: Verso, 2010), pp. 2, 4.
- 3 Jameson, "The Hegel Variations", p. 113.
- 4 Ibid., p. 116. Surprisingly, "Absolute Knowing" is never properly mentioned in the book, since Jameson rather engages with the notion of "Absolute Spirit", a label that Hegel applies to the last section of his *Encyclopaedia's* system and into which Kojève in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* frequently conflates the last chapter of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (see Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980)).
- 5 Jameson, "The Hegel Variations", p. 84.
- 6 The expression "cartography of the absolute" is employed by Jameson in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 3.
- 7 Alberto Toscano, "Seeing it Whole: Staging totality in Social Theory and Art", *The Sociological Review*, 60, 1 (2012), pp. 64–83.

- 8 See Fredric Jameson, *The Valences of the Dialectic* (London/New York: Verso, 2009).
- 9 See Alberto Toscano and Jeffrey Kinkle, *Cartographies of the Absolute* (Winchester: Zer0 Books, 2015).
- 10 See Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality. The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) and John E. Grumley, *History and Totality: Radical Historicism from Hegel to Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
- 11 Jameson, "The Hegel Variations", p. 24.
- 12 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne Mitchell and Wesley Blomster (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).
- 13 Jameson, "The Hegel Variations", p. 7.
- 14 Ibid., p. 15.
- 15 Ibid., p. 24.
- 16 Ibid., p. 4.
- 17 Ibid., p. 22. See Alain Badiou, *Theories of the Subject*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 113: "Here we are in the midst of our dispute. Lacan, the theoretician of the true scission, of which the Maoist maxim 'One divides into two' sought to preserve the irreparable force, against those repairmen of flat tyres, the revisionists, to whom is suited the syrupy conviction that 'Two fuse into one'." See also Mladen Dolar, "One Divides into Two", *e-flux*, 33, 2012 (<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/33/68295/one-divides-into-two/>).
- 18 Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, pp. 55–56 quoted in Jameson, "The Hegel Variations", p. 23.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Jameson, "The Hegel Variations", p. 50.
- 22 Ibid., p. 24.
- 23 Ibid., p. 40.
- 24 Ibid., pp. 40, 43.
- 25 Ibid., p. 49.
- 26 Ibid., p. 50.
- 27 Ibid., p. 126.
- 28 Ibid., p. 51.
- 29 Sergio Valverde, "Fredric Jameson's Anti-speculative Hegelianism: Jameson's *The Hegel Variations*", *Theory & Event*, 17, 1 (2014). [Muse.jhu.edu/article/539143](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/539143)
- 30 Valverde, "Fredric Jameson's Anti-speculative Hegelianism".
- 31 See Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda, *The Dash—The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).
- 32 Jameson, "The Hegel Variations", p. 51.
- 33 Ibid., p. 47.
- 34 Ibid., p. 15.
- 35 Ibid., p. 43.
- 36 Ibid., p. 83.
- 37 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Continuum 1981), p. 318.
- 38 Jameson, "The Hegel Variations", p. 66.
- 39 Ibid., p. 66.
- 40 Ibid., p. 52.
- 41 Ibid., p. 57.
- 42 Ibid., p. 89.
- 43 Ibid., p. 92.
- 44 Ibid., p. 112.

- 45 Ibid., p. 106. On the topic of Hegel's strong commitment to the object-matter see also J. M.H. Mascat, "Hegel and the Misadventures of Consciousness: on Comedy and Revolutionary Partisanship", in J. M.H. Mascat and G. Moder (eds). *The Object of Comedy. Philosophies and Performances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 51–73.
- 46 Jameson, "The Hegel Variations", p. 106
- 47 Ibid., p. 111.
- 48 Ibid., p. 111.
- 49 Ibid., p. 112.
- 50 Ibid., p. 113.
- 51 Ibid., p. 115.
- 52 Ibid., p. 77.
- 53 Ibid., p. 100.
- 54 Ibid., p. 102.
- 55 Ibid., p. 113.
- 56 Ibid., pp. 1, 3.
- 57 Ibid., p. 4.
- 58 Ibid., p. 4.
- 59 Ibid., p. 130.
- 60 William Desmond, *Philosophy and Its Others: Ways of Being and Mind* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), p. 21.
- 61 Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber NicholSEN (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 17.
- 62 See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 8.
- 63 See Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
- 64 Georg W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold Vincent Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 491 (§806).
- 65 Jamila M.H. Mascat, "When Negativity Becomes Vanity. Hegel's critique of Romantic Irony", *Stasis*, I, 1, 2013, pp. 230–245.
- 66 Frank Ruda, "Entlassen. Remarks on Hegel, Sacrifice and Liberation", *Crisis and Critique*, 1.2 (2014), pp. 111–129.
- 67 Jameson, "The Hegel Variations", p. 22.
- 68 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
- 69 Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping", in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 354.
- 70 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London/New York: Verso, 1991), p. 402.
- 71 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).
- 72 Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping", p. 353.
- 73 Ibid., p. 353.
- 74 Ibid., pp. 355–356.
- 75 Ibid., p. 356.
- 76 Ibid., p. 353.
- 77 Ibid., p. 349.
- 78 Toscano and Kinkle, "Cartographies of the Absolute".
- 79 Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. Henry S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany, SUNY Press, 1977), pp. 79–115.
- 80 Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping", p. 349.

- 81 Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, p. 93.
- 82 Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 2.
- 83 Jameson, "*The Geopolitical Aesthetic*", p. 2.
- 84 Toscano and Kinkle, "Cartographies of the Absolute", p.10.
- 85 Ibid., p. 8.
- 86 Ibid., p. 9.
- 87 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Rights*, trans. Hugh B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 21.

# 14 The Last Sigh of Absolute Knowledge

## Schiller's *Friendship* and Hegel's Readers

*Ivan Boldyrev*

In introducing his new translation of the *Phenomenology*, Terry Pinkard remarks that the text

ends with some misquoted lines from a poem by Friedrich Schiller. But why end with lines from a poem? Why lines from this particular poem? And is the misquotation deliberate or intentional? These are matters Hegel himself never explicitly cleared up, and they continue to inform the various conflicting interpretations the book has received.<sup>1</sup>

As a true Hegelian, Pinkard does not explicitly clear this up himself either, and we do not learn *which* conflicting interpretations are at stake here, but his questions are, of course, fully legitimate. A very similar series of questions were posed, serendipitously, by Rebecca Comay in her book co-authored with Frank Ruda and published in the same year as Pinkard's translation:

Why quotation, why poetry, why Schiller, why this poem, why these lines, why this peculiar rendition? ... Why, at the pinnacle of subject's self-affirmation, does it suddenly resort to the stammering of the mechanical memory?<sup>2</sup>

In what follows, I look at some contemporary answers to these questions. In no way do I pretend to consider all the metaphysical and literary complexities of Schiller's appearance at this decisive, terminal moment. I limit this analysis to concerns about Hegel's *alterations*: What does Hegel change in Schiller's text and why? and How do Hegel's readers interpret this misquotation? These may seem to be small points at first blush, but they are already too much. These changes turn out to reveal the central points of Hegel's speculative project, its relations with poetic and theological textuality, with political/historical reality, and, eventually, with itself. This chapter ultimately argues that Hegel's editing of poetry can help us clarify disagreements about the text and demonstrate how Hegel's philosophical project and his textual practices illuminate each

other. But before turning to the minutiae, some historical preliminaries are in order.

### 14.1 *Friendship's* Unending Emendations

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* can be thought of as a collection of implicit quotes: it draws on and reproduces the experiences of the previous forms of Spirit in order to sublimate them in Absolute Knowledge (or “Knowing,” as Pinkard has it in his new translation).<sup>3</sup> With *this* in mind, it should be less surprising to see a quote at the very end of the narrative and to witness Hegel—the reader of the past spirits, or the Spirit’s past—borrow the final word from Schiller’s *Friendship* (1782) for the consummation of this journey.

It is worth quoting at length:

*The aim, absolute knowing, or spirit knowing itself as spirit, has its path in the recollection of spirits as they are in themselves and are as they achieve the organization of their realm. Their preservation according to their free-standing existence appearing in the form of contingency is history, but according to their conceptually grasped organization, it is the science of phenomenal knowing. Both together are conceptually grasped history; they form the recollection and the Golgotha of absolute spirit, the actuality, the truth, the certainty of its throne, without which it would be lifeless and alone; only –*

Out of the chalice of this realm of spirits  
Foams forth to him his infinity.<sup>4</sup>

(PS § 808)

Here is Schiller’s original last stanza from 1782:

Friendless was the great worlds-master,  
Felt a *lack*—and so created spirits,  
Blessed mirrors of *his own* blessedness!—  
The highest essence found no equal,  
Out of the chalice of the entire realm of souls  
Foams forth to *him*—the infinity.<sup>5</sup>

There are several historical details that need to be mentioned before one can begin making sense of Hegel’s alterations. First, Hegel refers to the same poem later, in his Heidelberg history of philosophy lectures, reproducing the lines of the whole stanza. There, in the introduction, Hegel clarifies the relation of philosophy and religion and speaks of God as the God of living spirits. But as the first (1833) edition of the lectures demonstrates, many alterations remained:



Friendless was the great worlds-master,  
 Felt a lack, and so created spirits,  
 Blessed mirrors of his own blessedness.  
 The highest essence found no equal;  
 From the chalice of the entire realm of spirits  
 Foams up to him the infinity.<sup>6</sup>

Schiller's emphases are deleted; the dash following the "lack" is substituted by comma, while the dash after "him" is removed altogether; all kinds of punctuation marks are modified; and "realm of souls" becomes "realm of spirits."

The poem seems to belong to the repertoire of Hegel the lecturer. In what is left from Hegel's manuscripts, these lines appear in the same form and in a similar theological context. In the lecture notes on the philosophy of religion (GW 17, S. 253f.), Hegel talks about divine objectivity realizing itself immediately in all human beings—and then reproduces the last two lines, as well as the longer (again, not fully accurate) quote from Goethe's *Divan* on the myriads<sup>7</sup> of souls that were "consumed" by Timur's power—in the same way as a thousand roses were needed to produce a fragrance for Suleika.

Another important detail is that the original of Schiller's poem was also available only as a quotation. Its first publication, in the *Anthologie auf das Jahr 1782* (*Anthology for the Year 1782*), frames it already as a part of a "yet unpublished novel." This "novel" appeared in 1786 as *Philosophical Letters* featuring, with some alterations, the same poem. Whatever the source of Hegel's quote, he deals not just with a poem but with a speculative statement, also a part of the *Theosophy of Julius*—a small treatise on the nature of the universe that Julius sends in letters to his friend Raphael. The poem gives friendship an ontological significance and thus reflectively reenacts itself both as a written piece and the image of the universe: Julius's friendship merges with friendship as a general principle.

In 1786, Schiller, too, edited his poem. The word *lack* now lacks the emphasis it had in the original text, the two dashes are removed, and the highest essence sees the chalice of the entire realm of *essences*—*des ganzen Wesenreiches*—foaming forth. The three dashes and the exclamation mark are also removed. In fact, Schiller's text from 1786 comes quite close to what is printed in the first edition of Hegel's lectures, only – in 1786, the emphasis on *his own* remains, and Hegel still changes Schiller's "realm of essences" into "realm of spirits."

So, what exactly did *Hegel* change in reproducing Schiller at the end of the *Phenomenology* in 1807?

The text does not mention the great worlds-master anymore—he is replaced, invisibly, as it were, by the absolute spirit. The same goes for the concept of friendship. The new protagonist, the absolute spirit, is not

*friendless* without its forms but *lifeless*. The whole story of loneliness and separation is separated from the quote and substituted by “only –.”

Next, Hegel introduces explicit alterations in the quotation itself: the chalice (*Kelch*) receives an additional “e” – to preserve the rhythm; “the entire realm of souls” (*des ganzen Seelenreiches*) becomes “this realm of spirits” (*dieses Geisterreiches*); “infinity” ceases to be “the infinity” (*die Unendlichkeit*) and becomes “his infinity”—that is, it now belongs to the absolute spirit invading Schiller’s text and establishing “the actuality, the truth, the certainty of its throne” within this strange image.

Finally, Hegel removes the emphasis on “him” put by Schiller and deletes the dash separating “the great worlds-master”—turned absolute spirit—from his creations, or infinity.

I turn now to demonstrating how these Hegelian alterations can be read to grasp *the actuality*, *the truth*, and *the certainty* of Hegel’s speculative project—a project, for which after all, altering/difference/negativity seems to constitute a crucial operation, a nerve of an intellectual historian.

## 14.2 Actuality: Spirit’s Self-Referential Return

One reader who clearly noticed Hegel’s editing intrusions was Alexandre Kojève, who used these observations to reinforce his well-known “atheistic” perspective on the whole project of the *Phenomenology*. According to Kojève, by expropriating the realm of souls and making it spirit’s possession, Hegel

means to exclude the “Angels” of which Schiller speaks; he means to underline that eternal or infinite Being—that is, the absolute Spirit (which, in Schiller, is God), arises solely from the totality of human or historical existence.

Therefore, the temporal past of eternal Being is *human*, and *only* human. If one wants to talk about “God” in Hegel, therefore, one must not forget that this “God’s” past is Man: it is a Man who has become “God,” and not a God who has become Man.... And the third modification of Schiller’s text by Hegel has the same meaning. Schiller says: “*die Unendlichkeit*”; Hegel writes: “*seine Unendlichkeit*.” Thus the *Phenomenology* ends with a radical denial of all transcendence.<sup>8</sup>

Once Hegel’s absolute spirit is replaced—idiosyncratically—by *the totality of human or historical existence*, the actuality of its throne becomes the actuality of immanence as human history.

In his comments on Hegel’s use of Schiller, Slavoj Žižek tries to provide a more specific reading of this historical situation. For Žižek, Schiller’s pathetic attitude to friendship is just another reflection of his attempts to come to terms with a Machiavellian political reality. The reality of friendship and mutual recognition can only be constituted by a cold master

who has no friends and is, in Žižek's rendering of Schiller, forever separated from his creations.<sup>9</sup> Hegel's version is claimed to be radically different. In that in it,

God is not just playing a game with Himself, pretending to lose Himself in externality while fully aware that He remains its master and creator: infinity is *out there*, and this "out there" is not a mere shadowy reflection of God's infinite power. In short, the divine Absolute is itself caught up in a process it cannot control—the Calvary of the last paragraph of the *Phenomenology* is not the Calvary of finite beings who pay the price for the Absolute's progress, but *the Calvary of the Absolute itself*.<sup>10</sup>

This reading is not uncommon. In commenting upon the same passage, Donald Philip Verene has argued that

[i]n Hegel's version God's existence has a tragic face. God's relation to the forms of His creation is that of a fellow sufferer. Although his being is that of a true infinite [unlike the 'bad' infinite at the end of Schiller's poem—I. B.], he suffers the quest to make actual and determine all the moments within His infinite.<sup>11</sup>

This gesture, Žižek further argues, is the opposite of the famous model of the "cunning of reason," in which the Absolute remains untouched by the vicissitudes, contradictions, and tragedies of real historical events but nonetheless works through and sustains itself through these particular and private losses. Here, on the contrary, we see the self-sacrifice of the Absolute.

Žižek's reading of this sacrifice is political. For him, Schiller is proclaiming the aestheticization of politics, with the lonely master as the non-interfering Absolute, controlling the events but not meddling in them. This aesthetic revolution, for Žižek, who is following Comay's *Mourning Sickness* here, is needed to avoid the negativity of absolute terror and its "destructive revolutionary freedom."<sup>12</sup> Hegel's "reference to Schiller could be paraphrased as: only from the chalice of this revolutionary Terror foams forth the infinitude of spiritual freedom."<sup>13</sup> The role of the historical/political actuality of Absolute Spirit seems thus to consist in actually getting one's hands dirty.

What does this gesture really entail? We return to *this* realm of spirits, which implies that Hegel wants to paraphrase the situation of Absolute Spirit, its historical position, its time and space. *Historical* is to be understood in the sense that by engaging with Schiller's images, Hegel's speculation *returns to itself* and refers to its own procedure. Even Hegel's last word—*only*—can mean that Hegel wants to see the last words brought forth with a circling gesture of self-reference.<sup>14</sup>

This figure of thought is recurrent in Hegel's work, and not only in this retrospective last chapter but also in the familiar transition to the main idea of the *Phenomenology*, that of self-consciousness, when it becomes apparent that

behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless *we* go behind it ourselves, as much in order that we may see, as that there may be something behind there which can be seen.<sup>15</sup>

(PS § 165)

Another important reader, Katrin Pahl, also notes a certain *movement back* in the last lines: the liquid poured into the chalice—that is, the *Phenomenology* itself—should somehow come back to Hegel. This reverse movement—what Hegel calls “the revelation of depth” (PS § 808)—is what is happening in the last lines of the poem according to Pahl. In altering them, Hegel's conceptual recollection (*Er-Innerung*) becomes an exercise of actualization (*Vergegenwärtigung*), and comes back to itself.

### 14.3 Truth—In Alteration

Absolute Knowledge is philosophy that could overcome the pictorial thinking of art or literature and could sublate representation (*Vorstellung*) in concept (*Begriff*). Yet, it turns out that in the ending lines of the *Phenomenology*, absolute spirit's *truth* is not representation but misrepresentation, which is why Hegel must *change* Schiller. Philosophy must modify poetry to be able to elevate it to the higher speculative level of philosophical truth.<sup>16</sup>

Robert Pippin develops this idea of truth at length. He invokes the aesthetic qualities of the *Phenomenology* itself and refers to the idea of life—*Lebendigkeit*—from the later *Aesthetics* to argue that the mediating role of the *Phenomenology* for Hegel's system consists in enlivening philosophical concepts, for there is “indispensability of aesthetic representation in the expression of philosophical truth.”<sup>17</sup> For Pippin, the most important of Hegel's alterations are not fully visible—something Hegel does by paraphrasing, not just (mis)quoting, Schiller.

Pippin's reading of Hegel's editing practices emphasizes the Spirit's self-recognition (as a *Weltenmeister*) and claims that, eventually, Hegel must recount his theory of action as self-negation, as negation of the self-certain and self-sufficient position of subjectivity. Thus, Pippin ascribes to Hegel a theory of norms, which are only “living” through their attempts at self-knowledge manifest in works of art. It is this theory that motivates Pippin's Hegel to consider aesthetic representation not just as a mere illustration but, rather, as the very process of truth as well.

This “liveliness” of truth in Hegel could also produce ambiguity. Pahl reminds us that the spirit drinks this liquid of infinitude and erects its

throne over a *Schädelstätte*—"a heap of bones." "The message of these last lines is very clear: without the death of many, absolute spirit would be lifeless."<sup>18</sup> Hegel's later variations in the lecture notes—accompanying Schiller's chalice with Goethe's fragrance—only reinforce this impression.

Thus, on Pippin's reading, Hegel quotes—and thus recognizes the importance of literary expression;<sup>19</sup> he paraphrases and misquotes—and thus demonstrates how literature is "sublated" in philosophy so that Pippin can argue that the last words of Absolute Knowledge are neither exactly Schiller's nor Hegel's.

#### 14.4 Certainty, or the Final Destination

As soon as Hegel speaks for Schiller, he invokes "this" realm of spirits. In the language of the *Phenomenology*, the immanence of "this" means the return to the epistemic immediacy of sense certainty. It is exactly this certainty, on which the spirit's throne now reposes.

Indeed, this is what we read, famously, at the end of the *Phenomenology*:

Science contains within itself this necessity to relinquish itself of the form of the pure concept and to make the transition from the concept into *consciousness*. For self-knowing spirit, just for the reason that it grasps its own concept, is an immediate equality with itself, which in its differences is the *certainty of the immediate*, or is *sensuous consciousness*—the beginning from which we started. This release of itself from the form of its own self is the highest freedom and the highest assurance of its knowing of itself.

(PS § 806)

John McCumber recollects Hegel's play with the writing of truth. Hegel asks a sense-certain consciousness to fix its immediate knowledge on paper and then observes it fail. "And yet at book's end, writing the truth down succeeds."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the *Phenomenology* is written down. For McCumber, this means that the *Phenomenology* itself, by recapitulating its content, demonstrates how a self-mediation of the object could take place—that is, in the process of writing the text itself. And here, the familiar gesture of identification is crucial: "[T]he book's pathway does not *present* the self-mediation of the object but rather *is* that self-mediation."<sup>21</sup> What happens here, is another description of a self-referential gesture similar to the one I described above under "actuality." In a recent study of Hegel's *Logic*, Patrick Eiden-Offe calls this move *italicizing the copula*.<sup>22</sup>

The self-mediation is thus the writing of the book, while the stages of this development "exist only within the book."<sup>23</sup> The *Phenomenology* does not reflect or present its objects. Rather, it constitutes—and elevates—them. Hegel's work *qua* philosopher becomes that of collecting and putting the elements of the text in the right order, that is, actually writing and structuring

the text. The text gains new immediacy and certainty—the sense certainty of *this*—by getting back to itself. The *Phenomenology* is “situated: it is the unity not of all possible shapes of consciousness but only of these.”<sup>24</sup>

There are two important ways to understand this new certainty. One is suggested by Comay, who thinks of Hegel’s editing of Schiller as a “sacramental performative,”<sup>25</sup> a demonstrative, which, following the logic of the *Phenomenology*, is the agent of universality<sup>26</sup> seeking through its writing to erase the profound ambiguity, “the painful reference to divine lack”<sup>27</sup> in Schiller’s *Friendship*. For Comay, a crucial role is played by Hegel’s erasure of Schiller’s dash—“the stroke graphically separating creature from creator.”<sup>28</sup> Comay traces how this textual violence haunts Hegel’s own prose and how the dash, in particular, reappears as a central graphical and rhythmic element of the whole speculative project.

Pahl, on the contrary, sees the situatedness of Hegel’s rereading and rewriting Schiller as a new finitude. In her interpretation, Hegel’s return to sense certainty does not proclaim a new universalizing movement, as Comay seems to suggest. Rather, it marks a never-ending fragile openness. “[T]he subject of Hegel’s version of Schiller’s lines drinks its infinity ‘only’ from a specific chalice and its truth is therefore circumscribed.”<sup>29</sup>

## 14.5 Reading, Writing

The final certainty of the absolute spirit is thus uncertain—for in exposing itself to the contingency of history, it recognizes “its continued dependence upon what it began by excluding,”<sup>30</sup> upon Schiller’s chalice with the foamy infinity in it. There is, of course, still another danger: for it remains possible, as Werner Hamacher puts it in his commentary on Hegel’s earlier texts, “that Hegel’s speculative gospel will be misunderstood by its readers, and that its logos will be reduced to a corpse,” because this totality “is distinct from its realization.”<sup>31</sup>

And indeed, reading is dangerous. In a famous reading, Paul de Man demonstrated how a famous text (Walter Benjamin’s *The Task of the Translator*) that claims that translation is impossible does not lend itself to translation either,<sup>32</sup> thus “posthumously” confirming its claim. Something similar happens to the readings of Hegel’s Schiller at the end of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel misquotes Schiller, but Pippin, too, misquotes Hegel and claims that he substitutes Schiller’s “des ganzen Seelenreiches” with “des ganzen Geistesreiches,” implying the kingdom of (a *single*) Spirit, whereas the original (mis)quote reads “des ganzen Geisterreiches,” indicating the *plurality* of spirits.<sup>33</sup>

The passage, generally, seems to be a mysterious crossing, in which a collective hermeneutic effort becomes cluttered and disturbed. Another reader, McCumber, argues curiously that Hegel replaces *Geisterreich* not with a *Seelenreich* but with a *Schattenreich* (“realm of shades,” which is nonexistent in Schiller).<sup>34</sup>

What happened to these readers? It would be preposterous to claim that they misread on purpose—as if trying to eradicate Hegel’s mistakes and misprints by their own. Rather, the very dynamics of their object—Hegel’s text trying to grasp itself and Schiller—could prompt their misquoting. In reading the text, they started to mimic its author.

But the same mimetic mechanism seems to be at play in Hegel’s own relations with reading, writing, and reading-as-writing. Hegel quotes Schiller—but he knows that Schiller, too, (mis)quotes his own text. We have seen that, in the *Philosophical Letters*, Schiller deletes the dash separating the God and the infinity of His creations and thus brings *das höchste Wesen*—the highest essence—closer to the world by changing the realm of souls into the realm of essences, thereby removing the emphasis from the word *lack*, as if trying to domesticate his own creation.<sup>35</sup> In short, before Hegel subtracts Schiller,<sup>36</sup> Schiller subtracts himself.

Hegel introduces poetry into philosophical prose—again, repeating Schiller’s way of using his own verse in his *Philosophical Letters*,<sup>37</sup> of which the aim, characteristically, was to trace the “epochs of reason”—a task very similar to the one pursued in the *Phenomenology*. And yes, Hegel does take recourse to the Schillerian pathos of infinity and eternity to invoke “his”/Spirit’s own eternity—overcoming time in Absolute Knowledge. With these series of parallels, in which Hegel’s text comes tantalizingly close to Schiller’s,<sup>38</sup> the dangers of reading are revealed in another way. What is dangerous is not just misreading and misunderstanding but, rather, becoming so identified with your object that you lose your distance—if you ever had it—and find yourself exposed, in the historical situatedness of *this*, to the vicissitudes and limitations of your protagonist.<sup>39</sup>

So, what do we learn once we begin to follow these loyally wayward readings? If in the final passage Hegel indeed needed to reinstate the actuality, truth, and certainty of the Absolute Spirit’s throne, then the textual changes suggest, metonymically, a new perspective on these three needs: actuality as an exercise of retroactive sacrificial movement; truth as a fragile, temporary, and bounded embodiment, compatible, perhaps, with Hegel’s theory of action and thus utterly conscious; and certainty as a fleeting and unstable *this*. What many of these readers seem to overlook, however, is just how much Hegel’s writing actually repeats the thinking rhythm of its object, and how its giving “itself over to the life of the object” (PS § 53) means the final undecidability between the two, philosophy sharing the destiny of poetry, and so eternally returning us to the lonely “master of worlds.”

## Notes

- 1 In what follows, I refer to the text as PS and use the following edition (if not indicated otherwise): Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Transl. and edited by Terry Pinkard, (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Here (p. xxxv), Hegel’s collected works are quoted as GW referring to

- the volume and the page(s) of the standard German edition: *Gesammelte Werke*, in Verbindung mit der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft hg. v. der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg: Meiner, 1968 ff.
- 2 Rebecca Comay, "Hegel's Last Words," in Rebecca Comay and Frank Ruda (eds.) *The Dash – The Other Side of Absolute Knowing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018), p. 71.
  - 3 On Hegel's practices of quotation and generally on his textual practices, see Katrin Pahl, *Tropes of Transport: Hegel and Emotion* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012) and Ivan Boldyrev, *Die Ohnmacht des Spekultativen: Elemente einer Poetik von Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Paderborn: Fink, 2021).
  - 4 Cf. the German original: „*Das Ziel*, das absolute Wissen, oder der sich als Geist wissende Geist hat zu seinem Wege die Erinnerung der Geister, wie sie an ihnen selbst sind und die Organisation ihres Reichs vollbringen. Ihre Aufbewahrung nach der Seite ihres freien, in der Form der Zufälligkeit erscheinenden Daseins ist die Geschichte, nach der Seite ihrer begriffnen Organisation aber *die Wissenschaft des erscheinenden Wissens*; beide zusammen, die begriffne Geschichte, bilden die Erinnerung und die Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes, die Wirklichkeit, Wahrheit und Gewißheit seines Throns, ohne den er das leblose Einsame wäre; nur –  

aus dem Kelche dieses Geisterreiches  
schäumt ihm seine Unendlichkeit.

(GW 9, S. 433f.)
  - 5 Freundlos war der grose Weltenmeister,  
 Fühlte *Mangel*—darum schuf er Geister,  
 Sel'ge Spiegel *seiner* Seligkeit!—  
 Fand das höchste Wesen schon kein Gleiches,  
 Aus dem Kelch des ganzen Seelenreiches  
 Schäumt *ihm*—die Unendlichkeit. (Friedrich Schiller. *Werke. Nationalausgabe. Bd. 1: Gedichte in der Reihenfolge ihres Erscheinens. 1776–1799*. Hrsg. von Julius Petersen† und Friedrich Beißner. (Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1943), S. 111).
  - 6 In the *Theorie-Werkausgabe* edition of lectures (TWA 18, S. 96), these lines are, curiously, corrected again, to be brought closer (but not exactly identical) to Schiller's original. See the first version in Georg W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie. Erster Theil*. Hg. von K.L. Michelet (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1833), S. 92. The second edition of the lectures reproduces this rendering (2te, verbesserte Auflage. (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1840), S. 91). Michelet had some manuscripts at his disposal, which are not available today. In the critical editions of the history of philosophy lectures that have appeared so far (GW 30.1, 30.2), I could not find this passage. Dr. Klaus Grottsch, the editor of the lectures, has reported to me that in the forthcoming volume (GW 30.3), there is still no sign of Schiller's lines. In the lectures on the philosophy of religion (GW 29.1, S. 99), the two lines are reproduced in the same context, now closer to the *Phenomenology* but explicitly stating that it is God, not Hegel's absolute spirit, who is feeling loneliness and lack and becomes concrete.
  - 7 Before quoting Goethe's poem of 1815, Hegel writes "millions" in his notes (GW 17, S. 254).
  - 8 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 167.
  - 9 Comay demonstrates that this narcissism of the Absolute was something Schiller was aware of: he wrote the poem of reconciliation, but the whole



- stanza would reveal “the deep ambiguity pervading Schiller’s lines” (Comay, “Hegel’s Last Words”, p. 72).
- 10 Slavoj Žižek, *Disparities* (London etc.: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 257.
  - 11 Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection. A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985), p. 7. See a more elaborate version of this claim, drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Restlessness of the Negative*, in Pahl, “Tropes of Transport”, p. 97.
  - 12 Žižek, “Disparities”, p. 259.
  - 13 Ibid., p. 258.
  - 14 Pahl, “Tropes of Transport”, p. 98.
  - 15 Miller’s translation. Pinkard’s version of this passage is, unfortunately, misleading.
  - 16 See also John McCumber, “Writing Down (Up) the Truth: Hegel and Schiller at the End of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*”, in Richard Block and Peter Fenves (eds.) *The “Spirit of Poesy”. Essays on Jewish and German Literature and Thought in Honor of Géza von Molnár* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), pp. 47–59.
  - 17 Robert B. Pippin, “The Status of Literature in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*,” in Richard T. Gray, Nicholas Halmi, Gary Handwerk, Michael A. Rosenthal, and Klaus Vieweg (eds.) *Inventions of the Imagination: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Imaginary since Romanticism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), pp. 102–120, here p. 111.
  - 18 Pahl, “Tropes of Transport”, p. 88.
  - 19 “Some great faith might be expressed in the poet’s power by giving him ‘the last word.’” (Pippin, “The Status of Literature in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*”, p. 105).
  - 20 McCumber, “Writing Down (Up) the Truth”, p. 50.
  - 21 Op. cit., p. 53.
  - 22 Patrick Eiden-Offe, *Hegels Logik Lesen. Ein Selbstversuch* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2020), S. 66.
  - 23 McCumber, “Writing Down (Up) the Truth”, p. 54.
  - 24 Op. cit., p. 57.
  - 25 Comay, “Hegel’s Last Words”, p. 74.
  - 26 Op. cit., p. 144.
  - 27 Op. cit., p. 74.
  - 28 Ibid.
  - 29 Pahl, “Tropes of Transport”, p. 98.
  - 30 McCumber, “Writing Down (Up) the Truth”, p. 58.
  - 31 Werner Hamacher, *pleroma – Reading in Hegel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 138. Pahl’s reading goes in the similar direction: “In the end, the spirit of this *Phenomenology* surrenders to the uncontrollable effects of place and time and gives itself over to the future that will come to it from its readers” (Pahl, “Tropes of Transport”, p. 99).
  - 32 De Man (“Conclusions”. Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator” Messenger Lecture, Cornell University, March 4, 1983, Yale French Studies No. 69 (1985), pp. 25–46) demonstrates how the translations—the readings—of notable scholars, Harry Zohn and Maurice de Gandillac, contain the opposite of what Benjamin actually said in his text.
  - 33 Pippin, “The Status of Literature in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*”, pp. 113–114.
  - 34 See McCumber, “Writing Down (Up) the Truth”, pp. 47–48.
  - 35 See the updated version in: Friedrich Schiller, *Werke. Nationalausgabe. Bd. 20: Philosophische Schriften. Erster Teil*. Unter Mitw. von Helmut Koopmann hrsg. von Benno von Wiese (Weimar: Verlag Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1962), S. 125.

- 36 Comay, "Hegel's Last Words", p. 83.
- 37 See Comay, "Hegel's Last Words", pp. 71–72, 143–144.
- 38 "[A]ny summary of Hegel's own position ... sounds just as metaphorical and opaque as this talk of a divine being's experiencing the foaming of its own infinity from a chalice" (Pippin, "The Status of Literature in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*", p. 115). Pippin also demonstrates the parallels in Hegel's and Schiller's understanding of friendship (*Ibid.*, p. 112).
- 39 This is even more clear, once we read this quote as an invitation to come back to Schiller, as a reminder prompting us to look back at the literature and citation itself. Cf. Allen Speight's (*Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 41) understanding of this adaptation along similar lines.

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